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About bloody time



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ONCE MORE INTO THE BREACH



Ah, hello. Please come in... Sorry, stop me if you've heard this one before. Yes, I'm back at PCPP, dammit! Two years spent down and out in freelance and console land has caused me to

realise there's only one place I want to be. But since I missed my flight, editing PCPP proved a convenient alternative.

I'd like to thank Anthony for his generous remarks last issue and wish him all the best in his new role as PCPP's Canberra Correspondent... I mean, Editor-at-Large. You haven't seen the last of him, that's for sure.

Changes are afoot. This time next month I'll be welcoming a new Deputy Editor on board. Bennett Ring is his name, erstwhile Tech Editor of rival PC magazine, Atomic. Some of you may

know him already. He'll be heading up PCPP's expanded hardware coverage, and we couldn't have hoped to find a better man for the job. But more on that in four weeks. Fans of the delightful Dina need not be concerned, as she'll still be sub-editing every word on every page, thus relieving the rest of us of the need to spell correctly. You should learn, as we have, to ("fear" - Ed) her ("elite" - Ed) skill("s) - Ed).

There are a bare handful of content changes, too. Some are apparent this issue - the revised news section, for instance, retitled "Insight" and geared toward commentary and analysis of recent happenings - and the amalgamation of the twin tech and game review sections into one homogenous whole. We also welcome back, like a long-lost friend who hasn't aged at all, Mod Life, where old games go to, well... do it like rabbits, and birth a host of player-created progeny. We'll keep any further modifications (to the mag, that is) under wraps until next month.

I hope you enjoy the issue, especially the CryTek demo on the cover DVD - it's sweet.

David Wildgoose,
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INBOX

LETTER OF THE MONTH: Too Much Fanfare

The success and popularity of a game is often the result of people's expectations rather than the quality of the game itself. The oft-made complaint of much-hyped games falling flat on release demonstrates the massive anticipation and, consequently, expectation that publishers create and build, usually to such a high level, that it becomes impossible to satisfy. Half-Life, Deus Ex and No One Lives Forever are obviously great games in their own right, but it certainly didn't hurt they were released without too much fanfare only to be discovered honestly by gamers with no expectation or pre-release demands. Conversely, examples such as Black & White have shown the major disappointment generated when a game is so heavily promoted, despite the major advances this game in particular has made for others of its kind. Generally speaking - as there are always exceptions - games are like films: the less that is to be expected, the more it can delivered, and vice versa.

Marty

Do previews spoil games?
Is that sense of discovery undermined by overly revelatory articles in the lead up to release? Food for thought.

LITTLE NIFTY FEATURES

"Or is it merely because PC engineers focus on bringing out the next generation product today" (Editorial, PCPP#85). In a sense that's why they don't make computers to last. Watches can improve only to a certain degree - sure, you can add little nifty features such as timers, alarms and other nearly pointless functions you'll hardly ever use, but in the end, all a watch really needs to do is keep the time. Computers have so many different uses and purposes that to list them all is a complete waste of time. More to the point, computers are continuously being upgraded and improved to suit our needs, gaming in particular has a constant demand on the quality of

graphics. Now think about this for a moment, we could make a graphics card last a hundred years or more, but what would be the point when in 2 months it's already obsolete and within a year you'll want to buy a new one anyway? A watch tells the time, it can't get 'better' at telling the time, it does what it's meant to do and thus we can make it last. A computer isn't made to last; people would laugh if you were still running an old 386 because it was in 'good condition'. Albeit, engineers could create longer lasting keyboards and monitors that don't need to be upgraded so often, but overall, they should be focusing on bringing out the next generation product rather than protecting the hardware of yesteryear.

Exeat



Billion Polygon Breasts

Gaming has always shocked the elderly and religious types, with its depiction of killing, pain and now, even sex. Some of us play Counter-Strike, some of us play Neverwinter Nights, and others play Age of Empires, but who plays Largo Winch or BMX XXX? It's a whole new, shocking, breed of games.

Firstly, being a gamer doesn't necessarily make you a nerd or a geek because most people also have a life outside games, such as school, work, etc. Most people like to hang around with friends and try their hardest to build social skills to mix in at night clubs, parties, etc. Now a nerd is someone who indulges in DOA Beach Volley Ball. I mean, seriously, you're looking at computer generated models and you're calling it hot? Go mix with REAL women, don't be a nerd sitting at home indulging in billion polygon breasts! It's just plain wrong.

Secondly, we all know how easy it is for younger gamers (5-10) to buy mature games, like SoF2 in extremities. Do you really want your kids to see adult



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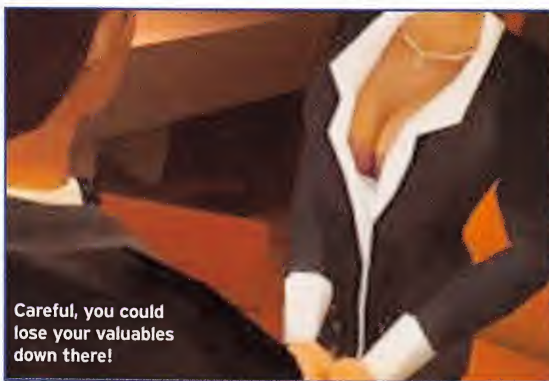
— — — — —
Infinite Strategy



TO THE GAME OF THE YEAR



blizzard.com



Careful, you could lose your valuables down there!

material in games? There are laws preventing children from buying magazines and accessing Internet sites, but the local EB couldn't care less that bought the last copy of Softporn Adventure or BMX XXX. What exactly are they trying to sell? Is it really an engrossing gaming experience with state-of-the-art AI, graphics, gameplay, etc? I think not. It's aimed at the same 18+ group that enjoy Penthouse. PCPP even wrote in Issue #86, page 16, "Developers will introduce new scenarios allowing players to... even have sex with in-game characters." A first-person shooter with sex orientated gameplay? What sort of game would that be? I would say boringly pathetic and, most of all, a nerdy game. Finally, I do agree that some games will not orientate the entire story around sex. Some like GTA3 simply use it as part of a humorous gameplay option. This is about all anyone needs or should be exposed to in games. Leave the porn to Playboy.

Phil Harrison

It's ironic that many "Mature" rated games are in fact more immature than many of their G rated counterparts. The approach to sex in games - and violence for that matter - is typically juvenile in its outlook. But it needn't always be thus. PCPP supports "adult material" in games, so long as it's handled in a genuinely mature fashion.

THIS TOTALLY STINKS

The Federal government has again decided that no R-rated games can be sold under any circumstances. This means that anyone who meets the age criteria (18 years) is still unable to purchase R-rated games in this country. What a disgrace! In my humble opinion, this totally stinks. I see no real difference



between the explicit content that is contained in an R-rated movie compared to an R-rated computer game. If there is indeed very little difference between the content found in these two mediums (eg content such as sex, violence, drug use, language, etc), then why is there a continued need to ban R-rated games? Are the adult concepts displayed in an R-rated computer game any worse, or more explicit, than some of the sick and twisted material found in trashy films? I would concede that the government may see that children may illegally obtain access to these R-rated games if they were sold via normal retail. In my experience, I believe most vendors to be highly unscrupulous in that regard. Minors could even gain access to adult material (games OR movies) from their parents. But even so, surely this is another problem altogether? Ideally, we should be limiting such a discussion to censorship issues and not who really ends up watching the material. What happens behind closed doors is none of the government's business anyway. They have no business in what goes on in my household, or who sees such games or movies.

Little Ditty

It all comes down to the issue of the "interactive" nature of games.

Little research has been done into the effect of interacting with such content, as opposed to merely viewing it as you would a film. Until this area is further explored, we'll in all likelihood see our government and others err on the side of caution.

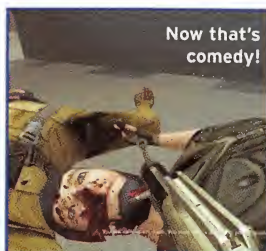
STABBED IN THE GROIN

While I enjoyed the editorial in #86, I have to say I disagree with the conclusion. I don't see the problem as storytelling poking its unwelcome nose in, but rather it's a matter of incompatible styles. If they want to tell a story inside the game, developers should go the whole hog and put some goddamn effort in. Hire some decent writers and make the plot, the level design and most importantly the characters mean something to me, and forget about the end-of-level stats. If you want to give me a blast 'em up, however, look man, I only need to know one thing: Where. They. Are.

Attempting to combine the two only results in yet another unsatisfying hybrid of unconvincing story and hokey arcade homages (or clichés, depending on your cynic quotient). The two are mutually exclusive. If the game developers have successfully immersed me to the point where I actively care about completing the level to unfold the plot, why should I give a toss how many storm troopers I've stabbed in the groin with the left side of my Darth Maul Lightsaber? It just makes for an awkward break. Or take SoF2: the atmosphere of an uber-realistic damage model and tense, gritty environments completely destroyed by ludicrous boss levels and shoot-the-blinking-weak-spot crap that was passe ten years ago on arcade games. Half-Life was successful as a game/narrative precisely because of short load times, virtually non-existent episode introductions and a complete lack of statistics. Why the hell are we not seeing this style reproduced?

Jay Rose

The best way to tell a story in a game is to do so in-game where the player is still in control, not through expositional cut-scenes. IF the player remains immersed in the world, the fiction will be far more compelling.



A BACK ISSUE

Just out of interest, I was reading a back issue (PCPP#62) and it said that you didn't review Evil Dead 'cause it was so horrible. If you did put the review in the mag, what would've it got?

Michael Crackman

A lovely big stamp saying, "FAIL".



Ahh, Ash. Where did it all go wrong?

FROM THE FORUMS: Why do they call them RTS?

Posted: Tue May 06, 2003

Subject: Why do they call them RTS?

"Why are games like C&C called RTS when they're actually tactical games? Always bugged me."

YellowDischarge, Crate

Posted: Tue May 06, 2003

1:40 pm

Real Time Strategy with the strategy part being where you employ different tactics.

Arjurian, MIB

Posted: Tue May 06, 2003

2:15 pm

Strategy:

A plan of action resulting from strategy or intended to accomplish a specific goal -from dictionary.com

Strategy involves thinking about how you are going to take out any enemy. For example, do I destroy all their harvesters and slowly watch them run out of money, do I take out the construction to stop rebuilding...

And one classic strategy in RTS games is the tank/grunt rush. Exodus, Crate

Posted: Tue May 06, 2003

2:30 pm

A game of Generals relies heavily on both tactics and strategy. They are both nearly the same thing anyway.

XzadxWiley, Cacodemom

Posted: Mar/23/2003

1:53 pm

Another obstacle for people with crappy PCs, like myself. Surtur, Grunt

Posted: Tue May 06, 2003

2:41 pm

You are wrong. They are different. Strategy is a general looking at a map and deciding to take a city. Tactics is how the city is taken. Destroying a harvester is a tactical decision. Strategy is moving armies, deciding who gets supplies, etc. Tactics is what the individual soldiers and small

units do. Ever wonder why a precision guided weapon is a tactical weapon? It's because it's designed to hit a specific target. That's small scale. A game of Generals has no strategy in it. It's all tactics. YellowDischarge, Crate

Posted: Sat May 03, 2003

8:35 pm

Subject: Half-Life 2 + Water = Wet Pants - 56K

The shadows on the water look very nice in the first pic. I wonder if the game engine can calculate accurate ripples in the water as the aliens move through it. I wonder if it will accurately react to the bullets you shoot through the water creating the splashes through the water. Not to mention alien blood staining the water and spreading out slowly from the dead aliens.

I wonder what the interactivity of all the NPCs will be like. I mean can we interrupt the police guy who has that guy on the ground like he's been arrested? Can we go talk to the other citizens lined up and hear them recall what happened when the aliens first attacked? Can we shoot one of the police guys in the leg and have the citizens panic and run off? Perhaps try and steal a gas mask? The "Eastern Europe" look of the city looks pretty cool. I wonder what the big "modern" looking complex-like factory or government research centre is. Perhaps we'll be able to take out a telegraph pole to halt the aliens or electrocute one of the striders. That pole in the last shot looks a bit off kilter.

I can't wait to see the in-game video of this game in action. Eloemosynator, Counter Terrorist

Posted: Sun Apr 27, 2003

6:21 pm

Subject: Postal 2 - Your opinion. It's crap. AthlonMan, Hitman

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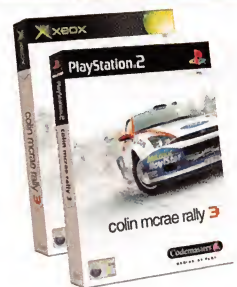
- Play Magazine.



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GAMENEWS

HEADLINES: nVidia shows off ■ Sony's new RTS ■ Activision digs some trenches ■ Quake 2 champ to help new online project ■ EA and nVidia join forces ■ Yamaha meets digital demands ■ Microsoft proves size does matter

GEFORCE FX

How it has so far fared against competition

Andrew Calvin

The GeForce FX is nVIDIA's new flagship consumer card, but its reception hasn't always been ecstatic. Complaints of high prices, high noise levels, low availability and low performance compared to the Radeon 9700 mean that consumers haven't been jumping on the FX bandwagon in droves. Still, it was the first card to offer DirectX 9 support, and one day I hope to play a game that uses it.

For quite some time after the launch of the FX series it was quite hard to actually purchase one. That seems to have been resolved although most of the larger mail order sites seem to have short waiting periods for the more popular cards. A check of the major on-line Australian mail order vendors suggested that the 5200 and 5600 GeForce FX cards weren't readily available, although the Abit 5800 Ultra could be pre-ordered for \$990. The 5200 ranged from \$181 to \$370. In comparison, the very well received ATi Radeon 9700 128 MB (277 core) is currently selling by mail order in Australia for around \$560. The Pro Ultimate edition sells for around \$715 and the new big brother 9800 Pro should be available for about \$880 real soon now. That will put a big dent in the 5800 Ultra's sales as the Radeon takes the lead as the premier consumer graphics card.

Although the 5800 Ultra is expensive, the 5200 is far more affordable. The lower end cards are considered to be generally good value, and it seems that you'd be mad to buy a GeForce4MX these days. Benchmarking with non-DirectX 9 tests suggests that the GeForce4 Ti 4200 is competitive with the FX 5600 Ultra, unless you're heavily into full screen anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering. Some reviews such as those on HardOCP are fairly scathing of their bang for buck. Others note that the



Stunning vista: nVidia shows what the card is made of

noise of the cooler is very annoying, particularly when the speed constantly changes when swapping between 2D and 3D.

Tom's Hardware Guide suggests that the 5600 sits between the Radeon 9500 and 9500 Pro, and agrees that there's little difference between a Ti4200 and a 5600 Ultra. The 5200 compares well with the Radeon 9000 Pro and 9200.

Most of the usual suspects are

building cards on the new chip set. Manufacturers include Albatron, Gainward, Leadtek, Prolink, S-Media, and Abit with many more to follow. The biggest difficulty for most consumers will be understanding where the various models sit in the market, and what separates one manufacturer from another. Variations on the theme include core clock speeds, TwinView, DVI, video in and out, integrated MPEG-2



decoders, and TV out. If you could find a 5200 with MPEG-2 decoding and TV-out, you'd be well on your way to a very nice home entertainment unit!

LORDS OF EVERQUEST ANNOUNCED

Warcraft 3 fans find Sony's new RTS
comfortingly familiar

Anthony Fordham



Seeing right: Not it's not Warcraft 3! Lords of Everquest looking familiar

The world's most popular massively multiplayer online roleplaying game (MMORPG) is about to change genres. Lords of EverQuest will be the first realtime strategy set on the EQ world of Norrath, and with it Sony Online Entertainment (SOE) clearly hopes to challenge Warcraft 3's record-breaking sales figures.

The announcement adds a curious symmetry to Warcraft 3 developer Blizzard's own announcement of World of Warcraft, an MMORPG version of its hugely popular RTS.

While early World of Warcraft screenshots show Blizzard's game will have a considerable visual edge over the ageing EverQuest, early Lords of EverQuest screenshots show a game that is at first glance almost indistinguishable from Warcraft 3. SOE clearly believes Blizzard has a winning formula, and seems to want to tap in to Warcraft 3's success to bolster Lords of EverQuest.

Lords of EverQuest will focus on Norrath's prehistory, unveiling the 'secret history' of the fall of the Ogres and a titanic battle between the Council of Rathe and the evil war god Rallos Zek. Secret magic, forgotten machines of war, and of course spells and abilities familiar to EQ veterans will all make an appearance in the game, as well as new additions to the mythology of Norrath.

Unlike Warcraft 3, LOE seems content to offer only three races, of which only the Shadowrealm has currently been announced. Made up of a loose alliance of trolls, ogres, dark elves

and nasty little gnomes, this 'race' seems like an odd hybrid of the Night Elves and Orcs of Warcraft 3, with a bit of Undead flavour thrown in.

SOE is promising an RTS unlike any other, a new 'evolution' of the genre. While more details will no doubt be revealed at E3, at this point it's difficult to see exactly how the game differs from Warcraft 3. Like Blizzard's game, all units can gain experience and level up, unlocking new abilities. Like WC3, players can summon from a selection of heroes - in this case called Lords -

to bring more powerful spells and attacks onto the battlefield. At this stage though, there are five Lords per side instead of only four Heroes per race in WC3, but when you remember there are only three races, this actually results in one less Lord overall.

Lord of Everquest will obviously appeal to EQ diehards who might be looking for a quick break from a 40 hour item farming expedition, but it remains to be seen how many new players SOE can bring in. Also, promising a no subscription fee online service like Battle.net seems contrary to SOE's "keep 'em playing to keep 'em paying" philosophy, so it will be interesting to see how the online giant will adapt to this radically different but more traditional revenue stream. Expect

more details after E3.



WHERE WERE YOU THE DAY THE NUBIANS SET FOOT ON THE MOON?



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WAR PLAY

All That's Old is New Again

Timothy C. Best

Activision has just announced Call of Duty, a first-person action game set in World War 2 and using the Quake 3 engine and which is being developed by Infinite Ward a company featuring ex-Medal of Honor developers. Where MoH limited you to the US campaign, Call of Duty will boast single-player campaigns for the Americans, British and Russians.

Not only is CoD set during the war to end all wars, it has been announced as just the first in a new

brand of war games for Activision. Activision isn't alone in going to war in an FPS kind of way.

Previously, we had Mortyr and two Medal of Honor games, but things kicked off in earnest with the success of the third Medal of Honor game and Battlefield Field 1942.

Now, Half-Life: Day of Defeat and Delta Force: Blackhawk Down should be making a beachhead on shelves and just over the horizon we have WW2 sequels Mortyr 2 and Hidden

and Dangerous 2 as well as expansions to Medal of Honor (Allied Assault Breakthrough) and Battlefield 1942 (Secret Weapons of WW2).

Then we have the 'Nam game including: Men of Valor: Vietnam and the all-but-confirmed Battlefield 1942 sequel, Battlefield: Vietnam, and the Operation Flashpoint sequel.

While Saving Private Ryan popularised WW2 action, and the games following down that path were not surprising, the Vietnam games are. Sure, there have been Vietnam RTS games released, but first person shooters which drop you into the steamy horror where you have to pull the trigger are a different kettle of fish.

With many veterans still suffering from post-traumatic shock Vietnam is a bold choice of setting.

Unsurprisingly, when 2015 was interviewed about Men of Valor: Vietnam, it said it was presenting an 'All America' version of what happened, meaning that it would look at the men of valour and the heroes of the war from a US perspective.

With many Americans seated firmly in the camp of patriotism there's a good chance any game viewed as a

tribute to 'All American' fighting men and produced by the US Army is likely to get a big tick. This sends to some critics the message that games don't necessarily trivialise serious world events. However, on a gaming level, the black and white nature of war is appealing to game designers as it contains the simple ingredients of a good action title, which includes emotional resonance, well-defined good guys and bad guys from a singular perspective, obvious objectives and plenty of movies to steal from.

It seems the tastes of gamers are turning as there is less interest expressed in the use of war metaphors in SF games with many shifting to digital representations of the real thing. However, this appeal is not indicative of the general public, as Sony had recently experienced.

When the Shock and Awe campaign against Iraq was still in progress, Sony had patented the term for its games. It was not well received and the negative feedback forced the entertainment giant to drop the patent and apologise for an error in judgement. Perhaps war is only acceptable after a period of rest...



Into the trenches: Activision demands more from its soldiers

ULTIMATE ARENA

7ee7 Skillz to Pay Da Billz

Timothy C. Best

Players can now turn their obsession into cash without even leaving their homes. Well, they can in North America at any rate. Welcome to the Ultimate Arena website.

Players log into the site, provide a username, password and their credit card or PalPay details and then transfer money into their account. Once moneyed up, they can compete in what's going or initiate tournaments of their own. They set entry fees between \$US1 and \$US20, choose the game, set the number of players, any special rules and map selection. When the right number of players sign-up, it's game time.

The individual or team that wins generates prize money by the entry fee credited to their account with a neat ledger of winnings and losses. Players are grouped by skill to keep

tournaments on an even keel and somewhere in the ballpark of fun.

Naturally, security is a major concern, so all games are played on the Arena's secured networks behind security software, which remains top secret. Unusual behaviour, modified files and user complaints raise red flags that will be investigated and any proven offenders will be permanently banned.

To make sure punters are serious, the Arena can also request users to submit a fax of their driver's license and their credit card for double checking.

For street cred, look no further than the Chief Gaming Officer and co-founder of Ultimate Arena who is none other than Denis "Thresh" Fong, world-champion Doom, Quake and Quake 2 player.

It looks like a whole new era of e-commerce, professional gaming, new



celebrity and kids playing for their next upgrade. Furthermore, this could see a streamlining of virtual economics in tournament-style games, thus changing it forever.

At the time of writing, the Arena is only available in North America and the only game is American Army, but Ultimate Arena organisers have indicated this is only the beginning. We'll have to see if Australia has the population and broadband to warrant our own credit-driven Thunderdome.



Champion made Chief Gaming Officer

NEWSWIRE

Two somewhat surprising publishing deals were inked this month. Relic Entertainment (whose Homeworld games were published by Vivendi and Impossible Creatures by Microsoft) have signed a two-game deal with THQ, the first fruits of which will be a real-time strategy title late next year. Meanwhile, Republic developer Elixir Studios has signed its next game - a strategy epic using the infamous Republic engine - to Vivendi. We wonder who was unhappy with who?

FRAGGED MOVIE

Short filmmaker turns to gaming for inspiration

Anthony Fordham

Sorry, we mean his film is short, not that he's particularly... never mind. Queensland filmmaker Kaine has produced a short film inspired by his experiences of gaming, particularly the frustration of losing a broadband connection and returning to dialup.

Called *Fragged*, the film can be downloaded in .avi form from www.boxheadfilms.com. It follows the adventures of 'Kaine', a Delta Force player suffering from Internet Withdrawal Syndrome.

Kaine believes gamers are an excellent source of filmmaking material. "What I find amusing about gamers is the fact that they will sit in front of their PC and play the same game for hours on end, only breaking to eat, sleep and go to the bathroom," he says.

"I remember a 17 hour *Diablo 2* session I did a few years ago. I was completely oblivious to everything around me. The house could have caught fire, but I still would have sat there and bashed *Diablo* 'til he fell."

Since the publication of *Fragged*, Kaine has received considerable interest from Novalogic, the game's developer.

"Recently the film was played at the media launch of Novalogic release of *Black Hawk Down* at Dolby Labs in LA. They called me from LA to tell me how much they loved it and asked what plans I have for the future. I am currently writing a few

things and compiling some ideas for promotional purposes for them. Who knows where it will lead."

In terms of further gaming inspiration, Kaine is very clear. "I would love to make a film about *Half-Life*. That was a fantastic game with a really good story," he says.

He also has some advice for other aspiring short filmmakers.

"Best tip I can give is become

best friends with an editor who has time, talent and access to a edit suite. Also stick to your budget. Don't try and make an epic film that requires too many people with hundreds of locations and heaps of props. Tell a good story, and keep it simple. And finally don't give up."



Directing gamers: Delta Force bleeds into the box office

UNHOLY TRINITY

Bastard son of Deus Ex and Max Payne from Activision

Anthony Fordham

What do you get if you take the biotechnological enhancements of a UNATCO agent and mash them into the bullet-time of *Max Payne*? You get *Trinity*, from Grey Matter and Activision. This new FPS from the people who brought you half of *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* will be set in New Orleans and follow the misadventures of the Nightstalker, an uber-enhanced secret agent guy who must bounce around town blowing things up in order to stop a hideous new virus. Grey Matter describes him as a vigilante, so hopefully we can expect a showdown with his original masters and suchforth.

So far, *Trinity* sounds a lot like a run-and-gun version of *Deus Ex*, what with the bioengineering and the viruses and all, but the inclusion of *Flash* abilities gives the game a fair degree of *Max Payne* flavour.

FlashTime in particular promises to allow the player to move around a level "in the blink of an eye" and will apparently come in super-handly in combat, as the player will be able to anticipate enemy attacks as well as perform some funky acrobatics and martial arts moves.

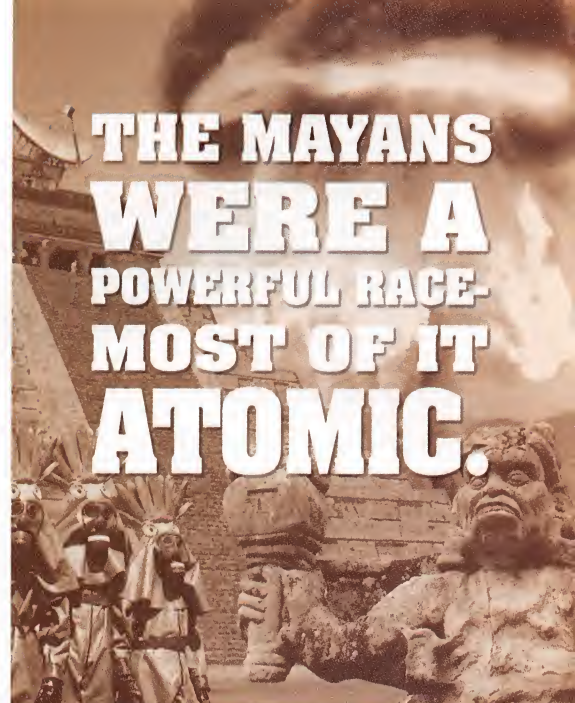
Grey Matter at this point is promising a "deadly assortment" of weapons, although the list is not hugely inspiring, containing as it does the familiar FPS tropes of pistol, shotgun, grenade launcher, MG and of course the ubiquitous sniper rifle.

In fact, the only genuinely interesting thing about *Trinity* at this stage is that *Trinity* was the code-game given to *Quake 3* by John Carmack at id Software, way back in 1998. What can this possibly mean? Should we

read something into it? Are the bugs crawling down the walls?



Electronic Arts has announced plans for a second expansion for *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*. To be subtitled *Breakthrough*, the add-on features a solo campaign taking the player from North Africa to Italy and a new multiplayer mode called *Liberation*. It's set for release in October this year.



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BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

The classic sci-fi series will soon be playing on a PC near you

Anthony Fordham



The funny thing about Battlestar Galactica is most people think it was a massive space opera epic that ran for a gazillion years, like MASH meets Doctor Who. In fact, the Battlestar only fought the evil Cylons for a year before being axed due, incredibly, to lack of interest.

Enough reminiscing, the Cylon menace is set to attack once more! Unfortunately for die-hard fans the game won't take place during the TV series but instead be set 40 years earlier. The Commander of the

Galactica, William Adama is only a lowly ensign, unaware of his fate yada yada, and will take control of a number of spunky space fighters in order to kick mechanical Cylon behinds.

There will be a space-based shooter in best Freespace fashion with massive capital ships, persistent wingmen and a variety of mission types including the familiar escort, bombing run and strike missions.

There's not enough late 70s kitsch in gaming, so we're definitely looking forward to taking the old Battlestar for a spin.



GIANT TEAM-UP

EA and nVIDIA Ally

Timothy C. Best

EA and nVIDIA have announced a strategic alliance, which effectively has the world's largest game publisher and the leader of consumer videocard technology sharing the bed covers.

The alliance means nVIDIA cards have become the preferred development environment for EA's studios worldwide, and the videocard giant gets exclusive OEM rights to package EA Sports and EA Games titles with its products.

EA will not only develop its games on nVIDIA powered machines and engineer them for maximum

compatibility, but the two companies are also in talks about producing titles with special features and effects for people packing the right videocard chipset. Madden NFL Football 2004 is the first game under discussion, with other PC titles to follow.

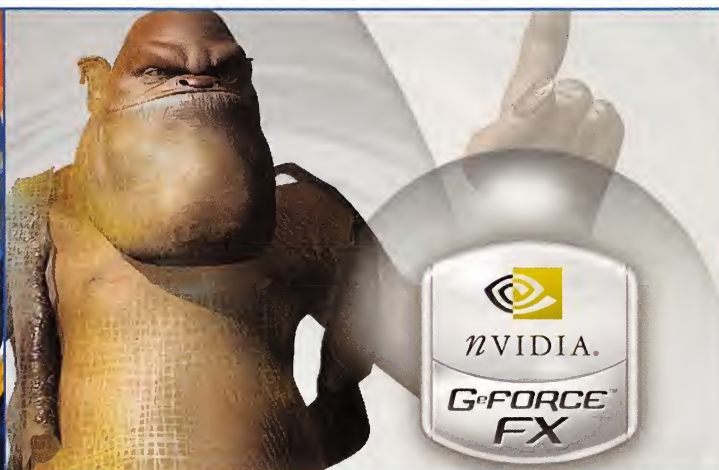
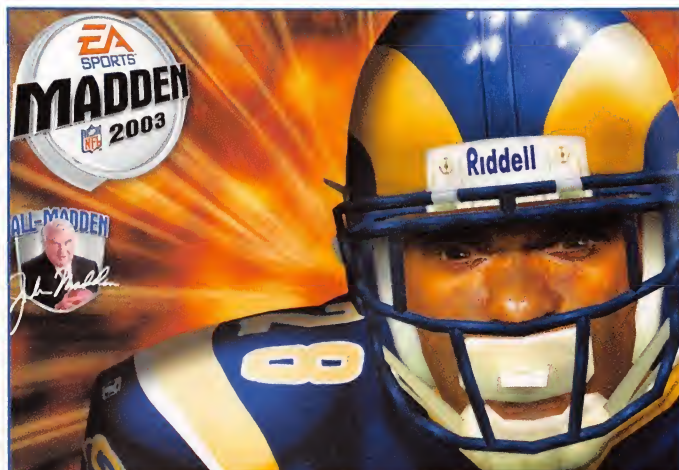
Every new EA title will sport the slogan, "nVIDIA: The Way It's Meant to Be Played."

This move comes after increasing competition from ATI and its Radeon chipset. For the past several months serious gamers with money to spend have been buying Radeon over the

nVIDIA options, despite nVIDIA's latest chip, the Geforce FX, boasting huge specifications and great Direct X 9.1 support. However, without the games to take advantage of these features, it comes out roughly on par with the Radeon. Cynical folk might look at this announcement as nVIDIA attempting to spend a lot of money to woo EA and raise its profile through smart

business instead of raising the stakes in performance.

While EA isn't likely to alienate its non-nVIDIA using customers by biasing game design too much, the biggest worry is this new relationship will exclude the smaller players (in other words, everyone else). Let's hope developers don't start choosing sides, because high-end special content and gaming experiences will become limited to an even smaller select few.



Locking horns or joining heads: These two gaming legends will soon be a single force to be reckoned with

NEWswire

LucasArts has announced a belated follow-up to its classic flight sim, Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe. As the name suggests, Secret Weapons Over Normandy focuses on the aerial battles of World War II including the D-Day invasion at Normandy. More news from E3 next issue.

ARMOUR-PLATED DVD

TDK gets serious about protecting discs

Anthony Fordham

Tired of a DVD that won't play just because you smeared some jam onto it and let a Silky Terrier drool on it? TDK has the answer - armour plated discs. When CDs were launched in the mid-80s, the marketing drive touted extreme durability, with images of users washing a CD in the sink, driving cars over it and dunking it in their coffee. As we all know, the reality sadly fails to measure up, as the average CD and DVD requires levels of care and cleaning similar to a vinyl LP record. But now, at last, TDK has produced a more durable disc. The recordable-media company that believes square eyes are a good thing (remember that ad?), claims that the new discs have 100 times the durability of a standard DVD. TDK's national brand manager Justin Whitehead makes a number of extraordinary claims about Armour Plated DVDs.



Durability: Will these finally stand the test of time?

"We wrote on them with permanent markers, we even tried to scratch them with steel wool pads, an extreme test that really shows off what the disc can withstand," he says. No word on dog-drool tests at this point, however.

Of course the discs will be more expensive than standard DVD-R media, but TDK reckons the premium is only about 20%, and will sell the disc at \$9.95

- pretty expensive compared to a single CD, but per megabyte this is still a competitive price.

Armour Plated DVD will initially launch a single-sided 4.7GB disc in the DVD-R format with DVD-RW, DVD+R and DVD+RW to follow later in the year.

HI-FI HARD DRIVE RECORDER

Yamaha makes an iPod for the big boys

Anthony Fordham



Are you an audiophile? Do you spend \$50 on cables made of gold and de-ionized antimony-cored hermaprodite lead? Do you think hard drive based MP3 recorders like Apple's iPod look kind of cool and offer funky options but the tiny little walkman headphone jack just gets your sound-quality-sensitive guts in a twist? Then Yamaha has the answer in the new CDR-HD1300.

First up, this normal-looking Hi-Fi component is not an MP3 recorder. It records standard 44.1KHz PCM audio files onto its 80GB hard drive, so the

sound quality is identical to a CD, and as a favourable result, it can hold up to 120 hours of music.

The cunning device offers all the usual functions found on an MP3 player, with the ability to create up to 999 playlists with 99 tracks each, name tracks, and organise tracks by genre, artist and title. What's more, the CDR-HD1300 has a 8x CDRW drive - not particularly fast by today's standards, but it does create perfect CDs with high quality sound and you can bet buffer-underruns and coasters are not something that needs to be worried

about. And yes, it does plug in to a PC for even more added control.

The CDR-HD1300 conveniently uses a standard IDE HDD and has a TV-out plug so it can be controlled easily from a television. And we can probably expect some bright spark to hack it in the near future to enable a 200GB hard drive to be installed. Now come on, that's some serious song storage.

WHERE WERE YOU DURING THE ROMAN MISSILE CRISIS?



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Dark Age of Camelot developer Mythic has revealed plans to offer a free downloadable add-on for its online RPG. The Foundations expansion will offer players the chance to purchase property and build housing. It should be available later in June.

DRIVING LINUX

nVIDIA and ATi get serious about Linux

Andrew Calvin

Although Linux is now quite popular, even for PC gamers, there have been issues with Linux-compatible drivers for graphics cards. In fact, some all-in-one motherboards can be a real handful to get going under Linux, particularly if you want to use the TV-out option. It's also pretty safe to say you won't receive a CD with Linux drivers on it when you buy a new graphics card. That situation is slowly changing, but it won't be a tidy situation for a while.

A worthy example is the nVIDIA driver set. At time of writing, the latest version for x86 architecture 32-bit OS was released on 24 April 2003. It provides accelerated 2D and OpenGL support, as well as TwinView, TV-out, TFTs and other flat screens.

One of the cool things about this download is it contains both precompiled interfaces for various Linux flavours, as well as source code for the interface. However, open source purists should note the source is for the interface, not the actual binary driver code. If it can't find an interface for your version it will try to ftp one from nVIDIA. If that doesn't work the installer will compile an interface just for you. However, this means you need a compiler and a linker, which you may not have initially installed. At this point, or if you have trouble, the readme.txt

file becomes compulsory reading, and you'll get to know `/var/log/XFree86.0.log` very well indeed! It's also worth noting you need at least XFree86 4.0.1.

Having said all that, you get a lot of control over your graphics drivers, even if you can't dig around inside the binary source code. The readme sets out many options for adjusting output, full-screen anti-aliasing, texture filtering, and more. Even the venerable Riva TNT is supported and that continues right through to the high end Quadro and GeForce FX 5800 ultra. The doco even notes hardware issues that won't be fixed, such as the Gigabyte GA-6BX motherboard (non-compliant with the AGP specification).

So, nVIDIA's put a lot of effort into its Linux drivers; what's ATi up to? It's clear they have thought about Linux and they provide third-party developers with kits and information. The Rage Pro and later cards are 'supported' (but not by ATi) under XFree86 4.1.0, but there are issues with some cards such as those found in laptops. ATi makes it clear that it considers most other issues are not

about the cards, but about XFree86 or Linux generally, and that it's not their problem. This position is, to some extent, fair, but ATi is the best positioned body to understand how their hardware works with commonly available operating systems.

The ATi web site has drivers for the Radeon 9700 and 9000, amongst others, but they are only in RPM format, which will cause some problems for a few distros such as Debian. Like nVIDIA's, these drivers

are not open source, but they offer performance and features not found in XFree in the 8.x and 9.x distributions. The issue behind the need to keep drivers proprietary is that the companies would need to release a great deal of technical info which would become common knowledge in the development community. That would then make create commercial problems by releasing confidential and market edge information.



VULCAN MINI PC

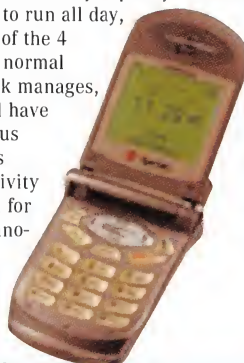
Proving that in IT, size is inversely proportional to sex appeal

Anthony Fordham

The other multi-billionaire at Microsoft, Paul Allen, has teamed up with a bunch of miniaturisation boffins to create the Vulcan Mini PC, currently the smallest machine able to run a full version of Windows XP. PDAs and some ultra-compact notebooks sacrifice such a large amount of componentry they must run either proprietary operating software, such as Palm OS, or cut-down versions of Windows like the idiosyncratic Windows CE. Additionally, these machines must be periodically synced with a desktop PC to update contacts, email, documents and more. The Vulcan (made by Vulcan, possibly for Vulcan) hopes to sweep

all this complicated gobbledy-gook away with the MiniPC, which has a form-factor much smaller than the average notebook, but still maintains all the connectivity and compatibility of a desktop PC. It's built around a 15cm LCD capable of displaying 800x480 resolution, is less than an inch thick when closed and has all the usual buttons you'd expect. The website describes the unit as having a "standard laptop keyboard" but from the photographs it actually looks more like something you'd find on a calculator or ultra-compact PC. The MiniPC will ship standard with 256MB of RAM, which is quite respectable for a personal organiser. It will also connect to a docking

station and provide support for all standard VGA resolutions. Will it have the power to play games? Unlikely, although 2D titles such as Diablo 2 and Age of Empires will probably work, which would be cool on long bus rides. The MiniPC promises a battery capacity that will allow it to run all day, instead of the 4 hours a normal notebook manages, and will have numerous wireless connectivity options, for the techno-freaky.



NEWswire

In a similar act of generosity, Relic will release a free add-on for its real-time strategy title, *Impossible Creatures*. 15 new insect creatures are the highlight of the pack, but new maps and environments will also be provided.

MYTHICA

Microsoft attempts to be all things to all gamers

Anthony Fordham



The disadvantage of a singleplayer game is that obviously you don't get to play with anyone else. The disadvantage of a MMORPG is that you often do very little beyond repetitively clicking on endless respawning monsters in order to maybe get some kind of rare item, while 'buffing' a perfect stranger who promises to help but then just runs away like an idiot.

Microsoft has unveiled an ambitious plan to bring singleplayer-quality gameplay to a persistent state world.

Mythica will be set in the Norse afterlife, where players will take the role of an already-dead hero attempting to gain immortal status from the Norse gods.

Students of history will be familiar with such Norse locations as Asgard, Valhalla, Niflheim and Yggdrasil, and can expect to hack and slash their way through these and more, trip trapping over Bifrost the

Rainbow Bridge toward the Halls of Asgard where buxom wenches grill entire oxen over roaring fires.

It's all fraught with atmosphere, but we're intrigued as to how it's actually going to work. Microsoft claims the game will allow every one of its thousands of players to feel like they are "central stage in their own adventure" as they battle through "a personalised journey unique to them". Yet the game will offer the "mechanics, depth and socialisation expected by veteran online gamers."

The game will apparently utilise private areas where small groups of players can enjoy detailed and "personalised" (there's that word again) adventures and indulge themselves in orgiastic rites of bloodletting and unleashing of titanic godlike powers. However, these private adventures will also apparently have some kind of effect on the persistent state world as a whole.

An MMORPG that's actually fun to play? We'd like to see that. And we will, at E3, so watch this space.

SATALINK ARRIVES

Insert bad "cereal" pun here

Stuart Calvin

Feeling a bit lacklustre lately? Well now you can and experience the real benefits of Serial ATA besides just the convenience of narrower cabling. US company, Silicon Image Inc., are shipping their fully v-1.0 S-ATA compliant SiI-3112 chipset for full speed ahead on a variety of motherboards. It's been trade-marked as SATALink and some readers may have noticed the capability creeping into motherboards recently available in Australia.

S-ATA is designed to provide for systems, which are easier to build, with cables that are simple to route and install with smaller connectors. For the manufacturer it meant improved silicon design and lower voltages, which alleviate current design requirements in Parallel ATA. End users benefit by being able to easily upgrade their storage devices and the configuration is much simpler with many of yesterday's requirements on block jumpers and settings no longer needed. There was a concern over the number of connects inside a PC, which had to double to

maintain equivalent parallel connectivity. However, the recently proposed Serial ATA 2 'Port Multiplier' technology should see up to 15 devices attached with hub technology. In any case, the system board interconnect has a much smaller footprint than a parallel IDE port, so it's a case of more with less.

Adaptec recently joined the Serial-ATA party with the launch of a set of S-ATA RAID cards. The two, four and eight channel cards are expected to replace low-end SCSI RAID controllers over time, as well as supplanting some of Adaptec's IDE (parallel ATA) RAID products. I suspect SCSI started losing market share at the lower end where the price difference can sometimes be as much as three times because of the pressure to get IDE drives into servers. Adaptec knows too well that their IDE RAID controller sales well outnumber their SCSI RAID sales. But even when S-ATA 2 arrives with 300MB/sec and extra features such as command queuing and drive hot-



Silicon Image Inc: Simplifies things just a little more

swapping, SCSI will still have the high end thanks to its advantages in areas such as error reporting and defect block handling. Promise too has launched S-ATA cards, both basic four-channel

RAID 0/1 models and intelligent versions with hardware RAID 5. Promise is also supplying S-ATA RAID chips to the likes of ASUS and MSI for integration onto mainboards.

Ensemble Studios has predictably announced an expansion pack for Age of Mythology. The Titans adds a fourth legendary culture - the Atlanteans - to the existing repertoire as well as the inevitable batch of new powers, units and maps. Expect it in time for Christmas.

DEVELOPER DIARY

BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON

Entry #1

In my office, tacked to a filing cabinet to the left of my desk, is a calendar. There's nothing particularly unusual about its form, nor its theme (images of historic York - sent by a printing company we once used and unlikely to ever use again). It's unremarkable in almost every way; anyone passing my desk would have no idea of the significance or the power held by these 12 sheets of glossy paper.

But flick through photographs of Winter's river Ouse, and turn over the page with Summer's sun-drenched Castle Howard looking magnificent, and pause at October's image of Duncombe Park's bare trees. There, circled in bright red mark pen is the number 10; a permanent visual reminder of a key date: the release of Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon.

So, welcome then, to the first Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon diary. In the lead up to the game's release - 10th October 2003 on PC, PlayStation 2 and Xbox - we'll be updating you on the game's progress, hopefully offering you an insight into the development process. With little more than six months until release, we are moving at a terrifying pace. It's going to be an exciting time all round.

First things, the news of THQ signing the title throughout the PAL territories was well received across the industry. We were immensely flattered with the attention it received, including a front-page piece on the trade paper MCV. As a former development manager of such publishers as Activision and US Gold, I know how a cooperative relationship between publisher and developer is vital - both sides need to work together for what should be a win-win relationship. THQ are absolutely committed to this game and have the passion and enthusiasm to build it into one of the year's biggest. We are very pleased to be working with them.

So, what is our vision for the game - our *raison d'être*? We have pretty much started from the basic premise: how can we

write an extraordinary, narrative-driven, gaming experience?

We aim to bring together the key elements of beautiful graphics and animation, a compelling story and characterisation and stunning audio all bound together with an intuitive interface. We continue to look at other adventures around us, but feel that most simply look outdated - many developers are afraid to let go of the tried and tested grammar of the classical adventure, which has resulted in a decline in sales of the genre. In the same way that Final Fantasy 7 reinvented the RPG genre - Final Fantasy 6 was considered too niche to even release in Europe - and Metal Gear Solid reinvented the stealth genre, we aim to reinvent and invigorate the adventure genre. I genuinely believe Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon will achieve this.

Our work on the GBA version of Broken Sword proved direct control works well and we've stuck with this with The Sleeping Dragon. Of course, the console versions come with controllers to suit this type of gameplay, but for the PC we have devised a unique mouse/keyboard combination (or keyboard only, if

preferred), which works very well.

With direct control we can use the 3D aspects of the environment to broaden the gameplay opportunities, but always adhering to the key rule that the game is primarily cerebral rather than requiring manual dexterity. As well as the 'detective' or 'investigative' gameplay associated with an adventure, we allow exploration of the environment in a true 3D format via climbing, shimmying, etc. I emphasise the interface is primarily mentally-oriented, so the exploration gameplay doesn't threaten someone who can't get past the first level of Tomb Raider!

We also include gameplay elements called 'Action Events', which are, in effect, interactive cut scenes. In an 'Action Event' the player is put under pressure and must work out what to do to get out of it - under time pressure. This is not the 'stab the right button unfeasibly fast' of Shen Mue, but 'I have several seconds to work out how to get out of this situation or I am in real trouble'. There really is a big difference in what we will be emphasising. Cutting edge art and technology is the key to provide an extraordinary game environment. I don't have time to expand in this diary entry, but it requires exceptional programmers and artists. We have a really strong team, certainly the best in our history and I intend to talk further about these elements in later entries.

This month, we've been working on the opening stage of the game, which sees George crash-land deep in the jungles of the Congo. It's an explosive and exciting introduction, which really sets out the excitement and drama of the game from the start. The plane skids through the jungle and ends up perilously hanging over the edge of a

chasm. The player's first task is to guide George to safety. It's a cliff-hanger, in every sense.

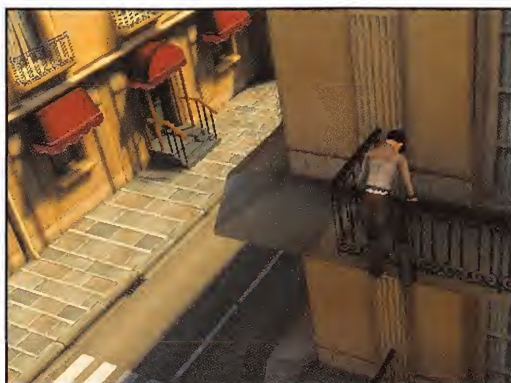
The requirement has been to create visuals to look both beautiful and threatening. This has been achieved by setting the time of day, so there is a reasonably strong sun lighting up a lush jungle, which is set against the cliff face of a huge ravine where a water fall cascades. It's a thrilling set piece, yet as it's the first section of the game it's obviously not too difficult.

It's more of a tutorial, but without being labelled as such: one of our goals is to write a game that is challenging, but never frustrating. This is something the Japanese, Nintendo in particular, do so well. If any player needs to read the manual, then we would have failed. We are also working on a help system, which balances the requirement needed to both not to spoil the game for the player whilst ensuring he/she does not get frustrated if stuck.

The fact we're working on the opening now was a deliberate choice. Game development rarely runs along a straight line - sections are developed in tandem and slotted together later on - but as the opening sequence is so important, we wanted the team firing on all cylinders. It's crucial that players are impressed from the off. And this bit will probably form the playable demo, too, which makes it doubly important. And that just about concludes this first diary. This month will result in our first fully-playable demo, which we're tremendously excited with. I'll let you know how that hangs together next month.

Until then.
Best,

Charles



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CREATE OR CAPTURE

Timothy C Best



Bruce Lee. What an amazing freak. I just watched *Game of Death* and it's terribly bad, right up until the last 15 minutes when Bruce goes crazy wailing on this amazing dude with nunchuku and beating up a now retired LA Laker who invented the Sky Hook.

The change from yawn to hold onto your seat comes with a change of actors. You see, Bruce died before *Game of Death* was finished and the stand-ins then had to convince everyone: "No, no, I'm the Dragon, honest!"

Without digital technology it took a lot of turned backs, shadows, camera tricks and dodgy shots, which really didn't do much for the movie. Really, all they could do was capture what appeared in front of the lens.

Twenty-one years later, Bruce Lee's son, Brandon Lee, died in a similarly creepy fashion before the film, *The Crow*, was finished. This time, the film makers had the aid of digital technology and with the obscuring rain and darkness, it resulted in a believable finish, although if you tried hard enough you could still see the smoke and mirrors.

Now, there is the *Matrix Reloaded*. They have finally done it. When the Hugo Weaving and Ted, from that *Excellent Adventure*, disappear and their computer models step in, the only hints these characters are far from flesh and bone begins when they pull stunts even Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Jet Li combined would find daunting.

Digital Realities

The world has been digitised. In that awesome melee between Agent Smith and Neo where dozens of Weavings soar through the air and fall like rain, everything you can see is computer generated - Neo; the faces on the martial artists; the buildings and even the point of view. No real camera could move like that. The whole scene is set in harsh daylight without breaks to hide the transition. It's jaw dropping.

There's an article on *Wired* that broke down how the Wacky Wachowskis managed it with endless film and still-photos shot from various angles. The 3D were then calculated from the different camera angles similar to how the human brain calculates using two eyes. Then the real-life textures were mapped right back onto the models, which of course, resulted in deceptively life-like characters on film.

Also, dozens of fighters were filmed taking hits and their motions were captured and facial expressions taken from five digital cameras sucking down one Gigabyte of data per second. In the possible event the filmmakers needed new angles, the whole fight area was moved from reality into a hard-drive, effectively making its own little matrix.

Ringin' True

If this sounds like movies are stepping on the toes of game technology, then discussing the *Lord of Rings* is going to sound like an overt invasion.

The special effects program, *MASSIVE*, used to create the epic battles for the Tolkien trilogy was as

close to filming a game in motion. *MASSIVE* was basically a giant RTS where modelled warriors would band together and fight, dodge around trees, charge their hated foes, flee in panic, regroup and much more. Each little character was a complete RPG creation with a pool of motions, fighting moves, different weapons and armour, varying speed and range just to name a few. Most importantly, each had an agent AI complete with fuzzy logic, which would make decisions based on their point of view. That's thousands of virtual orcs, humans and elves doing

The special effects program, *MASSIVE*, used to create the epic battles with tens of thousands for the Tolkien trilogy, was as close to filming a game in motion.

their own thing to simulate battles involving tens of thousands.

Although the margin for error was comparable to using good ol' thespians, Weta Digital, the company responsible for the CGI, said it didn't need the possible backup of rigging fights because the forces always ended up in the ballpark of doing the right thing, including winning and losing.

Weta then ran the fights over a few times until the filmmakers picked which battles best suited the effect they were after, and then rendered the sucker.

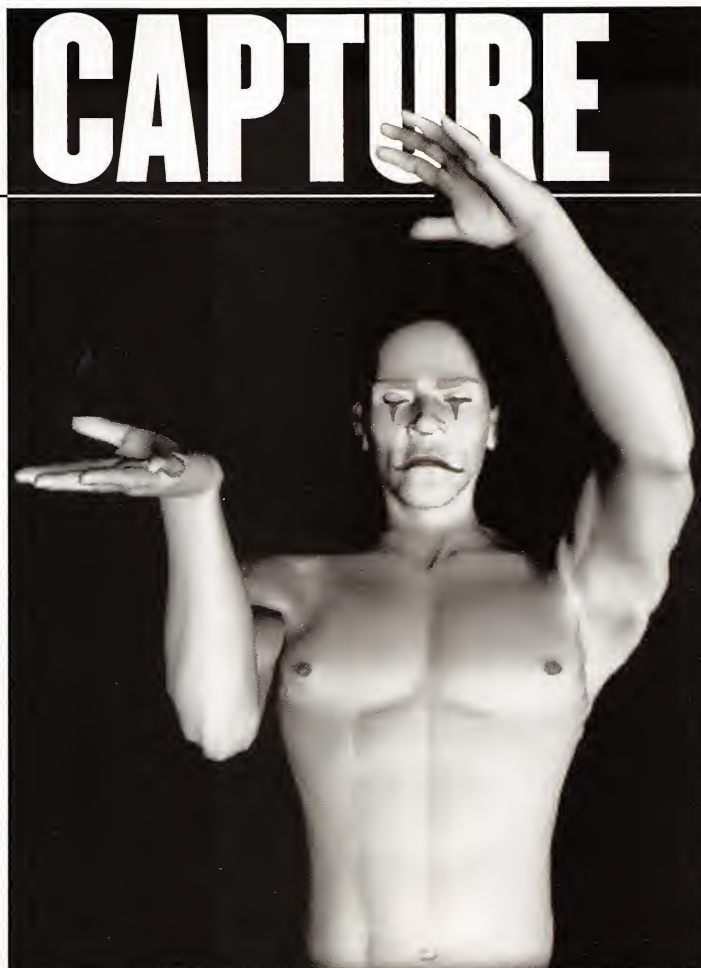
Enter the Matrix

It's not surprising when in the world of digital effects the boundaries between game and movie design disappear, especially if it's a movie with a seven digit effects budget.

Enter the Matrix takes this crossover a step further by releasing the game on the same day as the film. So to experience the whole story you have to watch the movie and play the game. If you've seen the movie three times, well, guess what? There's still an hour of footage you haven't seen - it's in the game.

Jada Pinkett-Smith, who plays Niobe and stars in the game, spent almost as much time being filmed for the game as the movie and more than twice as long reading dialogue.

Furthermore, every character, costume, story device and design drew double duty for cinema and



computer. While Ted and Hugo were being scanned for their scenes on the big screen, Jada was being digitised for her starring role in the game.

Full body scans using lasers turned her real body into computer models with hundreds of thousands of polygons much more quickly and accurately than any 3D artist, while simultaneously acquiring all of her textures. On top of this is the motion capture that makes Niobe move like Jada.

Making Reality

Motion capturing, if not full body scanning, has been around for a long time and has produced some amazing results, but, interestingly, many studios tend to shy away from using it, citing a preference to create and not capture.

In *Splinter Cell*, for example, all the main characters' moves were hand-animated even through the setting and bad guys are meant to be reality-grim. This was because the developers wanted Sam to move with a distinct superhuman grace. They wanted to express his character through a unique way of moving, I guess in the same way Core decided to express Lara Croft with a unique set of dimensions not available to be scanned anywhere on God's green earth. Then we have all those fine aliens who may be fairly hesitant to undergo full body scans. Maybe with the give-and-take between movie and game effects we're not out of luck here, either.

As scanning is cheaper than a digital creation, there is a perverse pleasure in thinking so many of the great puppets and animatronic creatures that were replaced by bad computer models (like Jabba the Hut) might return to be scanned into bad hi-res computer models.

Matrix Reloaded, *Lord of the Rings* and *Enter the Matrix* all sing and dance this interplay between game and movie production, but they also demonstrate something more important: the interplay between capturing and creating. We can now capture expressions, motion and city blocks that never were and we can digitally create things that are real. Ultimately, bringing fantasy to life will never be the same.

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SALT OF THE EARTH PEOPLE

The Guerrilla Gamer



Why is it so difficult to be a gamer without being a complete arsehole? Why do we Almost-Men - because the hobby is still 85% male - seem to find it so hard to be normal and tolerable in polite society? Why does every single tiny thing we ever do have to be part of some great big challenge as we search endlessly for an opportunity to prove our superior knowledge over some hapless fruit who hasn't heard of USB 2.0?

Why, whenever we go into a large computer chain store, do we find it necessary to smirk at the sales attendants earning \$11.50 an hour as we patiently and condescendingly explain to them that the Compaq package PC, which they didn't build and we would never in a million years consider buying, is crap because it only has a 133MHz FSB? Why?

And yet at the same time as we walk around with degaussing wands and interferometers we bought at Dick Smith's pretending to be electronics geniuses, are we subject to endless bag searches at checkpoints, while kids in bulging trenchcoats waltz right through? We let sales assistants call us 'matey' and patronise us, interrupting us in the middle of our technobabble to go help some hot chick that just walked in. We treat the world like we're too good for it, and in exchange, the world treats us the same.

Who do we blame for this? Do we blame the games because they have simplistic storylines, gung-ho heroes and women with waistslines inversely proportional to the size of their breasts? Do we blame a focus on 'realistic' weaponry while lateral thinking is tossed aside along with true interactivity? Or do we blame the lack of social simulators, where a helpful PC program trains you to negotiate the horrific faux pas minefield of an evening down the pub?

I, for one, blame none of these. As Freud more or less said, sometimes a game is just a game. Anti-social Counter-Strike behaviour is essentially no different to anti-social playground behaviour - especially if we ignore the fact that many of these virtual playmates are 26 years old. No, rather than the games themselves, I blame the medium of the Internet.

Yes, at long last I'm jumping on the Net-bashing bandwagon. It's the source of all evil, you know, clogged stupid with pornography and detailed instructions on how to build nuclear weapons with half a packet of bicarb of soda and the stuff you scrape off the sides of matchboxes. To me though, the real danger of the Internet, and why it turns merely maladjusted nerds into ravening sociopaths, is the forum.

That's right, the forum, the self-updating PHP-powered database that displays the wild rantings of socially dissatisfied teens to whoever has wit enough to enter its URL.



Everybody has forums - the games, the servers, even this magazine. Forums proliferate on the Net like pimples proliferate on my over-generous arse after an all-night peanut M&M and Star Trek Voyager binge. When forums work, they work very well - users are able to quickly and effectively exchange ideas and get on with whatever bizarre fetish they're into. But when forums go bad, its horrific.

The problem is this. Imagine you read an article in a newspaper that offends you. You can either quickly dash off an ill-considered ranting email to the editor full of bitter invective and crude sexual metaphors, which they will never print, or you can take your time and craft an elegant and

**Bad forums turn gamers into
arseholes, because it's not face to
face and you think it's a good thing
to have time for your stunning
comeback to hyPerGeEk 224**

sophisticated piece of criticism, which may indeed make it into black and white. A forum, on the other hand, offers instant and largely unmoderated publication for whatever petty passing grievance has you in its clutches, allowing you to spit and howl at the object of your frustration.

But don't forget, once you've published on a forum it's there for all time. Even if you go back and delete your post, other helpful forum users will happily repost what you said out of their own Internet History folders, and call you a stinking coward for self-editing. Even if you apologise later in the thread, people will still be able to read your initial insult and so the soothing balm of forgetfulness and misquotation is never able to do its work - the anger lives on.

This is why the forum is evil. Because of the basic premise outlined above, a whole new set of social rules have evolved, and they are NASTY. No quarter is given. Forgiveness and forgetfulness are simply impossible - because the post where you called JohnnyX a kiddie-

fiddling cow molester is still there, it's like you're calling him a kiddie-fiddling cow molester EVERY DAY. Imagine the worst thing that anyone ever said to you in the privacy of your own lounge room. Now imagine having it written indelibly on the wall so you see it every time you walk in. That's the forum.

Forum users have been forced to evolve a supreme arrogance where everything they ever say is always true, even when it's been disproved. A simple error of fact can turn into a bitter flaming thread hundreds of posts long, including such wonders as crudely photoshopped images of hardcore pornography with your head stuck on the top. Every little thing on the forum, because it's always in someone's face, can be a source of fury to others - even your Avatar (a small graphic that appears every time you post, like a visual signature) can generate reams and reams of hatred from other users.

It's a malestrom, an endless fight, a vicious psychonautic headtrip where humiliation and intellectual dominance are the only currency. Where else would a statement like, "No. Just no." be considered a detailed and well-rounded argument?

Bad forums turn gamers into arseholes. Because it's not face-to-face, because you can think for a few minutes before responding with your stunning comeback to what hyPerGeEk_224 said about your mother, it's tempting to think that this is at last an arena where your intellectual superiority can finally reign unchecked. Think again. A flame burns everyone, remember that, it's Goddamn trite, but remember it.

The Guerrilla Gamer is a crusty old games journalist who still hankers for the good old days of bedroom isolation and boxes that plugged into the TV and went bing. He has never been able to adequately embrace the Internet, despite spending most of his time at a local games cafe screaming at impossibly distant South Koreans as they slam him at Starcraft over and over again. Not only is his submitted work always late and rampant with profanity, it is also often covered in dried cornflakes, passionfruit seeds and spittle. Hey, he fills a page.

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A SMALL FISH IN A BIG POND

Stuart Calvin



I thought it timely to report on my experiences with broadband. The pitfalls of upgrading CPUs and AMD processors in particular must wait a little longer. So I thought it only coincidence that as I migrated to a 512Kb/s Internet connection, so did Editor-at-Large AnthonyF fall victim to the general lack of broadband access across Australia. He now tries to ignore me over a dial-up connection. I have no pity as I have only to send him 3-4 MB attachments until I have his undivided attention. But I haughtily digress. What broadband users must understand is that "always-on" increases the risk of non-traditional cyber attack. For example, many PCs are vulnerable to spammers who look for open-relays, so they can launch spam attacks from remote machines - like your machine - and it can be done. The next thing you know, you're shut down faster than a peep show in Brisbane and the

It was here that I met someone trained by the best: The Bastard Operator from Hell. If you've never read these narratives, then do so and imagine me as the caller

ISP small print says you stay down. I really don't like or trust software firewalls as I recently spent some hours, again on the wrong side of midnight, undoing a firewall from a small business network because a popular firewall application had hopelessly closed useful and necessary ports. The LAN machines were left as Exposed Hosts for the dangerously knowledgeable to exploit. The sad thing is this particular firewall was only doing what it was told at the behest of its administrator. In the right hands in the right situations with the right settings software firewalls work, well sort of, most of the time. At this point I thought I had it all cracked and packaged ready to go...

Putting the Cus back into Customer Service

I would like to state for the record that I am very pleased with my Telstra ADSL connection. The whole thing is now fuss-free and it 'just works'. I say fuss-free now because it was nothing near fuss-free from about mid-February when I signed up and things did not go as planned until the first week of April. I did a LOT of research, but apparently not enough about Telstra supplied modems. I have now forgiven myself for thinking a "Telstra single port modem" is not actually a single port modem unless it actually has a single

RJ45 Ethernet port - silly me. I can understand the now sensible advice to simply throw away the supplied make-believe single-port USB modem and ditch the Ethernet software after you get it all going. Crazy, you think? If you sign up for Telstra ADSL over the net, like I did, the supplied modem delivered to your door in 2-4 days does NOT have an RJ45 Ethernet port. If you sign up in a Telstra Shop, the modem you walk away with DOES have an Ethernet port. The Telstra four-port modem is just too expensive to be a sensible SOHO option. Don't get me wrong about the USB modem because if you run just the one PC, don't run a network with shares and printers, don't see the need for a router and/or hardware firewall, don't want to run two NICs, don't see a need for future-proofing and feel OK about leaving your PC virtually unprotected 24/7/365 then go right ahead. You just don't get any flexibility for security or network expansion.

I suppose it was very ridiculous of me to actually believe 'Sales' because if they had any technical nous at all, they'd have been in 'Technical Support'. The Technical Support people can't really help until you've been 'activated'. They don't care that the kit doesn't work as advertised because that's a Sales problem. But Sales reckon that it's a Technical problem because the Sale has concluded. The really clever people work in 'Activation' and are the most helpful people I have ever dealt with. I suspect if you can survive people like me in 'Sales' then later in 'Technical Support' you get to retire to 'Activation' and live in relative peace until people like me, again, find you. I perchance spoke to someone in 'Billing' because I needed to disconnect my second line. Employees who can't tolerate Technical Support because they either have little or no people-skills get a posting to Billing where, I stupidly forgot, they can perform the most harm. It was here I met someone trained by the best: The Bastard Operator from Hell.



If you've never read these narratives then please go to

<http://bofh.ntk.net/Bastard.html> and

try to imagine me as a caller. All I wanted to do was place a hardware firewall between me and the modem. Don't take this the wrong way, but if you don't use a Netgear FR114P or its wireless cousin or something like them, then you're insane. If you can block unsolicited UDP and TCP packets then you really are halfway to a secure always-on system. Antivirus software takes up most of the slack with an anti-spyware program and an anti-spam package the icing on the cake. However, this assumes you do apply relevant and appropriate security patches for your OS, browser and email client. I tried to point out to Telstra that a single-port Ethernet modem actually has to have an RJ45 Ethernet socket built into the unit... somewhere... to be legally sold as a SINGLE PORT modem.

Get yourself connected

"I want to escalate this", I confidently, but foolishly, said. "Yes sir, please hold..." Eck, I'm still holding and I think my prosaic email of complaint went straight to Billing with an enduring red flag marked "watch this guy". If you're inspired however, and want to leap onto ADSL you should find a D-Link DSL-300 modem for around \$200. You could get a Billion BIPAC-711CE for around \$150, but you have to fiddle with bridging. The Netgear FR114P firewall/router/print server should also come in around \$200. For \$400-\$450 through razorprices.com you get a bullet proof setup with standard Network Address Translation, PPPoE login and, importantly, a true Stateful Packet Inspection for protection. If you don't understand anything I've said then you have some serious catching up to do. And, please, mail me at setup@pcpowerplay.com.au

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GAMECHASER

The flotsam and jetsam that deserves your attention **with Mabel Li**

REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION

Storm the gates and bring down the leader

Developer: Elixer Studios
Publisher: Eidos Interactive
Distributor: TBA
Available: TBA

Almost five years in the making and two years since games journo types slathered over it at E3 2001 in the US and Republic is still in the works - but this time, it's getting close to finish time.

Aptly developed from a country that had its fair share of political upheavals, Russia's Republic is a strategy game with elements of RPG that has the player charting their unscrupulous political process to the top. You will play an ambitious leader of a small political party in the fictitious country, the Republic of Novistrana, and you have grand plans of overtaking it and booting out the leader with the support of the rabble behind you.

But first, you must start from the bottom up and that means ousting the local leader of the party. After then, you can move to the second stage and begin conquering cities. When at last you have captured the capital city, you will have realised your goal and all will hail the leader of Novistrana.

Don't be fooled into thinking the number of people in towns and cities are a small mix of nibbles for a party of ten. Elixer is serious and we're talking numbers of 10,000 people for towns, 50,000 in the city and the population of the capital reaching a staggering 100,000. If you judge by size alone, then the scope of the game is impressive. But what really struck a chord with a lot of strategy enthusiasts was the potential for complex and dense gameplay. Elixer took this aspiration seriously, but,



unfortunately, the open ended nature of the game, proved to overwhelm the less than hardcore fans of the genre and, as a result, the development team has recently restructured the game to give less ambiguous direction for players. This is by no means a less ambitious feat as Elixer is forming Novistrana as a country with its own cultural identity. You can find out news and current affairs via its website concerning court trials of corrupt Novistranian politicians and even an act for the Eurovision song contest.

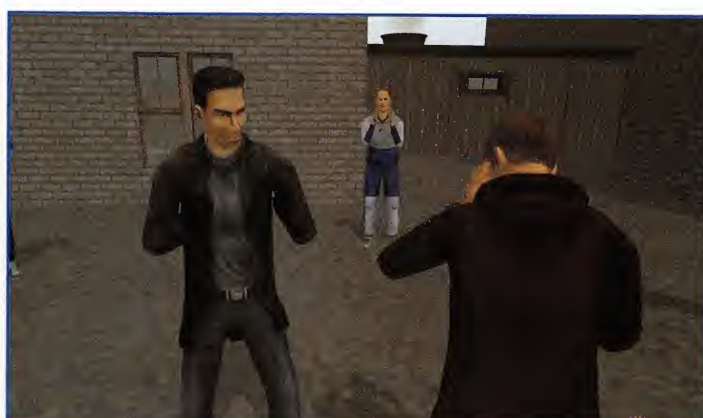
Despite the changes to the game's structure, the means with which you can overtake the country is not limited by the objectives set out. There are numerous ways you can complete the minimum three of the five assignments without following the most obvious route before progressing to the next stage, but that is left to the player to figure out.

There are also various ways you can



tempt the thugs, religious leaders and politicians to aid your revolt, each requiring different strategies in accordance to their personalities and rank in Novistrana's communities, church or government. Use the wrong tactic and you could find yourself picking up the pieces or, worse, charged for treason. For example, using heavy-handed tactics with a priest will unlikely add him to your ranks, but maybe a few Novistrana currency notes in an envelope could convince him?

As you develop your body of supporters, make sure you choose wisely, as they will be doing most of the legwork in picking up ground support. Each leader in your cabinet will be rated on power, intelligence, physical strength and charisma, which means it's probably a bad idea if you have a Goebbels-esque general convincing the local heavies to join your party. Watch this space for more developments on the eagerly anticipated game at E3 Los Angeles.



HEADING LINEAGE 2: THE CHAOTIC CHRONICLE

Will this one put the Magic in MMORPGs?



The first Lineage drew its phenomenal crowd from our Asian neighbours and was enough to rival the success level of Everquest and Ultima Online in the western market. The few enduring features that had Lineage claiming "the world's most popular persistent state world", are about to be blown into full scale to please the wider global audience in this latest online adventure.

Its concepts are simple. Lineage 2 will have a social foundation based on player entities known as "blood pledges". Players that decide to form such a bond with each other will benefit from all the club privileges, as well as extended playing options. Large battles, castle conquests and inter-pledge trading can all come from blood pledge commitment. This forms the basis of a complex political and economic system.

Developer: NCSoft
Publisher: NCSoft
Distributor: TBA
Available: TBA

While the game world certainly encourages players to cultivate powerful and organised blood pledges, it also harbours vast amounts of small quests to keep low level newbies occupied and in shape for the real game.

The world of Lineage 2 is, in fact, the prequel to its fantasy bound predecessor. It is a land abuzz with the familiar races and artisans. Forget about the hackneyed old system of tiresome levelling up and fate-defining attribute choices in character creation from well-known online titles. The only thing to worry about when creating a character in the beginning of the game is choosing the race and class. Player stats will only be dependent on a combination of these two factors. And as character level goes up, new skills and classes become available, making a mid-game class switch possible. The full fledged freestyle environment of Lineage 2 means flying and attacking in the sky, exploring cities under the sea and sniping from buildings and ramparts. It'll be about accomplishing group goals, growing in power and having fun in a dynamic and social world. Sounds simple doesn't it?

STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE 2

Classic setting with a new turn of events

Developer: Ritual
Publisher: Activision
Distributor: Activision
Available: Q3 2003

You are once again Alex Munro and things get interesting from mission one with an invasion from the Borgs. You will then be leading the defence against Starfleet's Enemies and must escape with your crew. This first mission pretty much sets the tone for most of the game, which is a lot of objective driven action at a relentless pace.

The old enemy favourites of Borgs, Klingons and Romulans return with a couple of new breeds to help make trouble. Where weaponry is concerned, your character will get to choose from some familiar Star Trek gears, including the phaser, Romulan disruptor, compressor rifle and even a tricorder sensing device for solving the game's puzzles.

Most of your efforts will be spent in

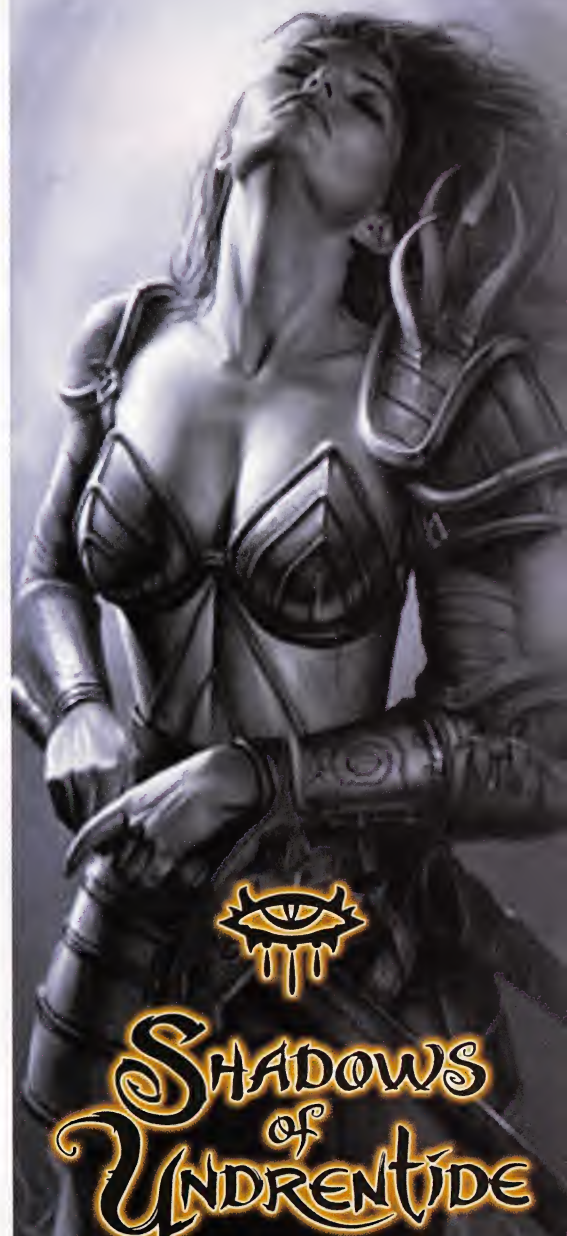
frantic battles and exploration. There will also be a few timed missions thrown in for a truly frantic task execution. Besides the straight main plot, the game keeps its stash of mini games and light humour interspersed throughout and somewhere in your mission, you'll be forced into a romantic interlude with a bikini clad scientist.

Genre-specific details shine via characters such as Captain Jean-Luc Picard, along with a complete supporting cast of familiar faces.

Ritual offers some of the finest elements of action gaming in Elite Forces 2. Trekkies and ordinary folks alike will have something in common to rejoice over.



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS



SHADOWS of UNDRENTIDE

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PAIN KILLER

It's only fair the Dead gets a second chance

Developer: People can fly
Publisher: DreamCatcher
Distributor: TBA
Available: August 2003

Plead for Speed would have been a better title for this game. The premise here is the player gets to be Painkiller, a masculine Demon-slayer, who unwittingly gets sucked into a war between two Undead tribes.

If you thought Serious Sam had a psychotic herd of killing machines, the monsters in this game will change you mind! There's nothing more unnerving than ugly, aggressive looking things neither human nor machine launching at you in organised groups. In this game, you will get to face the likes of vampires, zombies and other sorts of unholy rotting flesh.

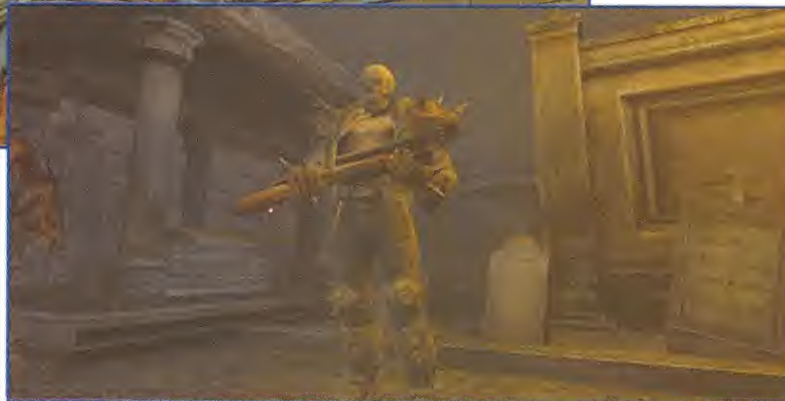
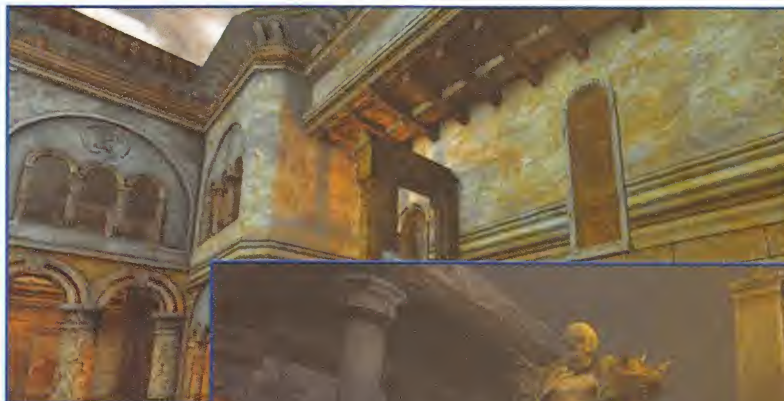
The whole experience is promising to be a commercial-free adrenaline rush. Numbers of up to thousands of Undead units will congregate in larger levels. What is the formula? Unflinching nerves and relentless stamina at the controls. Nothing with legs

should be underestimated in this game. The enemies will have enough wits and won't make it easy for you.

Even more thoughtful is the absence of the usual 'brake pads' found in a shooter, such as puzzle solving, precision weaponry like sniper rifles, and controls. For the same reason, weapon types favoured will be unanimously blast-centric. All of which will work in pairs for added impact, so, for

example, a grenade launcher bundled with a shot gun would be fun. The bad guys not only shoot back, everyone will be literally bouncing off walls. A lot of exhilaration can be expected for the MP modes.

Astonishingly beautiful settings will set the atmosphere of the game and having to trash a place that resembles Westminster Abbey and turning it into a slaughterhouse can fill the player with feelings either guilt or glee, depending on aesthetic or destructive persuasions.



CHROME

Every hero needs that little bit extra...

Developer: Techland
Publisher: Strategy First
Distributor: Infogrames
Available: Q2 2003



Human body implants are a thing of the future, so in this game it's a thing of the present. We roll forward to the 25th century where you take over the fate of Logan, a highly trained soldier turned mercenary forced to make a living carrying out dangerous tasks. Things start out as normal as a mercenary life is meant to

be by retrieving objects of importance and taking care of guards along the way. And it's not all that bad. You get to exercise a little creativity with your inventory of arms and aids. Precision and targeting is a big emphasis during an attack. In order to get decent aim, speed and mobility will need to be compromised and this is when combat

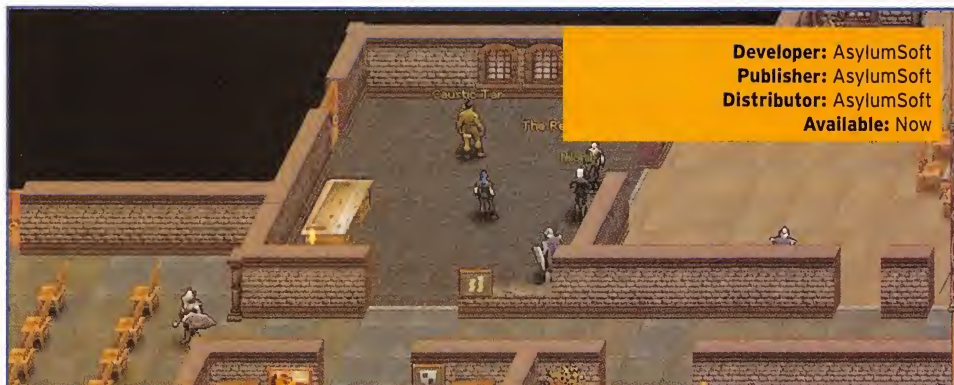
strategies come into play. Pretty soon, Logan gets himself mixed up in intergalactic corporate warfare, over Chrome, the most precious resource of the future. The story has its conspiracies, betrayals and other nasty surprises that should keep fans of a solid plot happy.

The performance-enhancing body implants are a great way to get temporary boost in skills for both Logan and enemy units. For example, you can improve your muscular strength, target precision, endurance and even stealth abilities. You will soon find out the cost for enlisting the help of these technological wonders.

To accompany the story, missions add a nice variety of skill difficulties across different planets that set the scenes. Some of these will test your discretion, while others involve wild chases on roaring all-terrain vehicles. Somewhere down the track sleek headless Mechs will join the party too.

DRANSIK

Medieval in name not by nature



Developer: AsylumSoft
Publisher: AsylumSoft
Distributor: AsylumSoft
Available: Now

You begin your online existence tentatively as a warrior equipped with nothing but an empty sack and some squidgy muscles. You are no match for what awaits you beyond the walls in front. This is the land of Dransik, a place fear-stricken by its own heroes fallen from grace.

The story waits for you to write it after a tumultuous prologue of corruption by power, betrayal of the loyal and yearning for restored peace. You come just in time to save this mess, or maybe just to enjoy a morally-irrelevant quest for higher stats. The Dransik server expects thousands to wander by this

paced medieval adventure, and that means plenty of socialisation with the mages, knights and rogues.

For those used to the bulgey dimensions of any 3D game, the 2D sprites might be a let-down. On the other hand, it could mean a sustainable game experience focusing on the bigger issues of moving on instead of lingering and admiring. And for the majority of modest users, it could mean a smooth enough ride along the way.

Getting started will be a breeze with the game's simple interface and the minimal set of rules. The attraction of the voyage for you may be executing missions and uncovering twists in the story or to make life simple, there's plenty to kill and treasures to loot. As MMORPGs go, patience and a little common sense go a long way. If you can pact with other wanderers, all the merrier. Will it be a monthly fee too dear for its worth? Only time can tell.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

When escape artists get locked up together

Developer: Pivotal Games
Publisher: SCI
Distributor: TBA
Available: Q3 2003

Here's your chance to re-enact the greatest practical joke ever pulled on the Germans during World War 2 - plan and execute an escape from Stalag Luft North prison camp. It wasn't easy back then for the 600 professional escape artists, and don't expect any better on your PC, either.

Stealth and discretion will make up a major part of the gameplay. Don't walk if you can tip-toe, don't confront if you can sneak up behind them and always, always cover your tracks. Tactical key-hole views allow an offbeat source of info to facilitate your next move, and situations spring up that demand a quick trick of diversion.

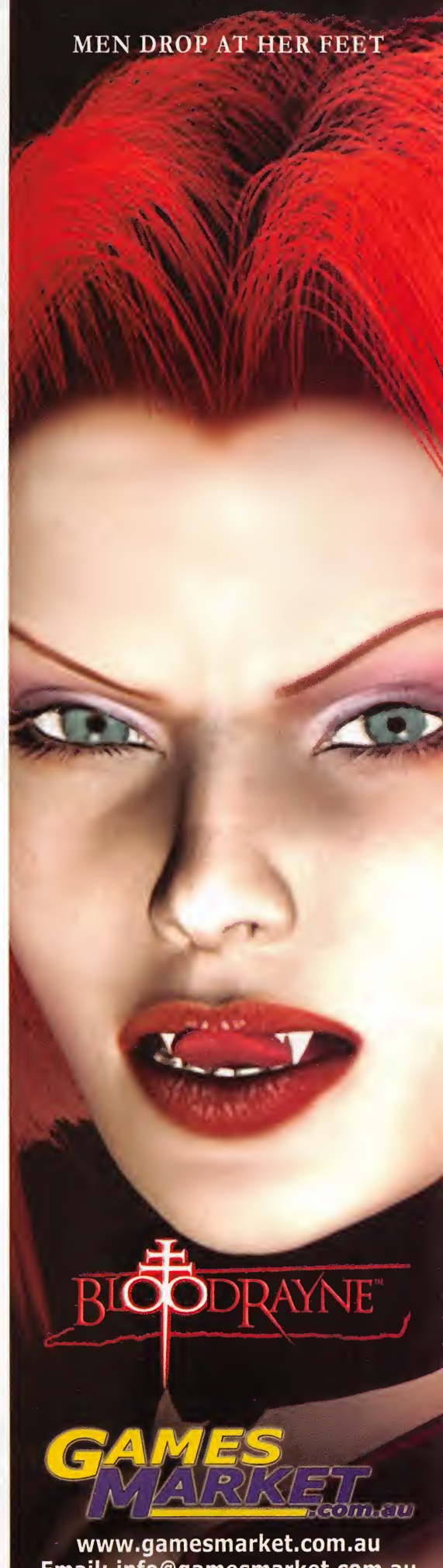
To aid you in performing this historical feat, four of history's original protagonists will be under your direct command. Each man is a master of his trade with valuable talents to be exploited. You will come across plenty of helpful hardware in the form of arms and vehicles, all ready for your escaping pleasure. The action is kept interesting and realistic by varying from

tense moments that require delicate operations to speeded up sequences with all guns blazing.

We've all had to escape from German guards in the past, in one game or another. The exhilaration from this game will be unique when you finally taste freedom, just as those manly dudes did in WW2. Not to mention the confirmation that you're at least half the man Steve McQueen was.



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TECHCHASER

All the bits that we cram in at the last moment with **Anthony Fordham**

GAINWARD GEFORCE FX 5200

Price: \$209

Distributor: PCRange

Contact: (08) 8322 9544

Do you still have a TNT2? Do you run a S3Vire chipset? Wow, that sucks. I bet you'd just love to be able to tell all your friends you have a GeForceFX, and that you only paid \$209 for it. Of course, it won't be a GeForceFX 5800 Ultra, it'll be a 5200, but they don't really need to know that, do they?

The 5200 is nVIDIA's new entry-level card, based on the NV34 core. It really has nothing at all to do with the

FX 5800 - it has no intellisample technology, pretty lacklustre FSAA performance and much slower memory. But it is a DirectX 9.0 card, so for all those DX9 games that are around the corner, it'll do you proud!

You're bragging rights are most important right now and you can safely claim you own an FX. Just don't mention it's a 5200, because the laughter of nerds can be a cruel, cruel thing.



THERMALTAKE SUBZERO CPU COOLER

Price: \$279

Distributor: PCCaseGear

Contact: (03) 9568 0932

We love complicated cooling solutions. Have a look in this month's tech reviews for a water cooler so complicated it will turn your brain into cheese. But what we love even more than complicated coolers, are complicated coolers that work.

This thing from Thermaltake is just funky enough for us to deal out a dollop of PCPP respect. It uses that much lauded thermal electric cooling, passing a current through the cooling plate to carry heat from one side to the other. It's more

effective than a chunk of metal with a fan on top, but not spectacularly so.

Where the SubZero really takes off is in its processor controlled fan usage. If the included PCI card detects the right thermal conditions it will actually deactivate the CPU fan, resulting in a quieter PC. Of course, whether a constantly running fan is actually more irritating than a fan that appears to start and stop randomly is a question for the individual. Give it a go though, it's techno-good!



VIGOR2600WE ADSL/WIRELESS ROUTER

Are you looking to finally sign up for some ADSL action and have wisely decided to turn your back on the devil Telstra and go for one of the third party providers? One thing you'll note is a number of them don't include an ADSL modem in their setup costs. Sure, you could buy one of their crappy modems for \$250 and get one machine online, but why not get a Vigor2600WE for the whole family?

It's a combination ADSL modem, four port router and wireless access point. Not

Price: \$399
Distributor: PCRange
Phone: (08) 8322 9544

only can you get multiple machines on your ADSL connection, you don't even need to string your house up into a complicated S&M cat's cradle of blue UTP. Wireless is the future, dear readers, and it's here. Of course you'll need to purchase wireless adaptors for each of your PCs, but PC Range has those too, for about \$95 each. Not too pricey at all.



XS DRIVE 2 40GB DIGITAL WALLET

Price: \$495

Distributor: Aus PC Market

Contact: www.auspcmarket.com.au



What the devil is a digital wallet? Well kids, it's imagination time: imagine you are at the hottest party ever with your funky digital camera and you are taking pics of girlies (or cute boys for our 10% female readership) in tiny little dresses and suddenly your flash card is full. What do you do? Rush home to download your pics onto your PC and rush back to the party only to discover a room empty of everything except the little dresses, which now lay like, discarded candy wrappers? Or do you instead whip out your XS Drive 2, plug in your flash card, download the contents to the internal 40GB hard drive, and then keep on photographing?

The great thing about this nifty device is that it takes all of the major flash card types including CompactFlash, Memory Stick, Memory Stick Pro, and with an extra adaptor you can also plug in SD and XD Picture cards. It does everything you could want it to and looks pretty damn cool in the bargain. Handy!

ANTEC PSU

Price: \$189

Distributor: PC Case Gear

Contact: www.pccasegear.com

The TrueBlue is a straight up good quality PSU from Antec. It's a 480W unit, so it should take care of anything. And like all Antec PSUs, the TrueBlue uses a double ball-bearing system to reduce fan noise - couple an Antec PSU with the Thermaltake TEC cooling system also on this page and you have yourself one seriously quiet PC. Of course, you need to have a case with a window, otherwise your light will be hidden inside a bushel of PC goodness.



MULTI-PC SWITCH

Price: \$332.50

Distributor: Serverlink

Contact: www.serverlink.com.au

Many switches are quite simple, taking two sets of VGA/PS/2 ports and turning them into one. You simply lean over and flick a switch to change between PCs. However, this can cause problems because Windows often doesn't like having its mouse disconnected. The SL-221 solves this with clever technology. Not only does it not need an external power supply, but it also has a nifty on screen display that lets you name PCs,



has a specialised IO chip to fool each PC into thinking its mouse and keyboard is permanently attached, and you can use hotkeys to switch between machines.

However, it doesn't support a USB mouse, which is a bit of a bummer, because who the hell uses PS/2 these days?

COMPUTER TOOLKIT

Normal toolkits are satisfactory, but they never seem to have enough right sized screwdrivers and so you end up paying \$150, but find yourself only ever having used two tools. Not so with this little beauty. It's got everything you could possibly need: eight different screwdrivers including those with weird looking heads for weird looking screws, a pincer, a handy anti-static container and even a chip



Price: \$20

Distributor: PC Range

Contact: www.pcrange.biz

extractor. We don't recommend you get in to extracting chips since most chips these days are actually soldered on and attempting to extract them will probably do a bit of damage to your motherboard, but, hey! We're not your parents or significant other, you can do what you like!



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The only catch is that to stand any sort of chance of winning, you're gonna have to fork out some cash and subscribe. For as little as \$48 (or \$110 if you want a year of DVD PowerPlay), you could win five grand worth of kick-ass hardware. Sounds like a pretty sweet deal to us. And we should know, we did 4-unit maths at school. Photocopy the form, fill it out and send it now!



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- * 16x DVD-ROM Drive
- * 24x CDRW Drive
- * Skymaster case with motorised front shield and blue LCD

NOTE: Electric Blue is supplied as a 'bare' system - no operating system is installed. You will need to install Windows XP Professional (included) yourself - simply place the WinXP CD in the DVD-ROM drive and follow the prompts. All driver discs are included. The Electric Blue PC has been built and tested by PCPP staff. It is supplied as is and has no warranty, explicit, implied or otherwise. If you win it, and then break it, all we can do is make sympathetic noises.





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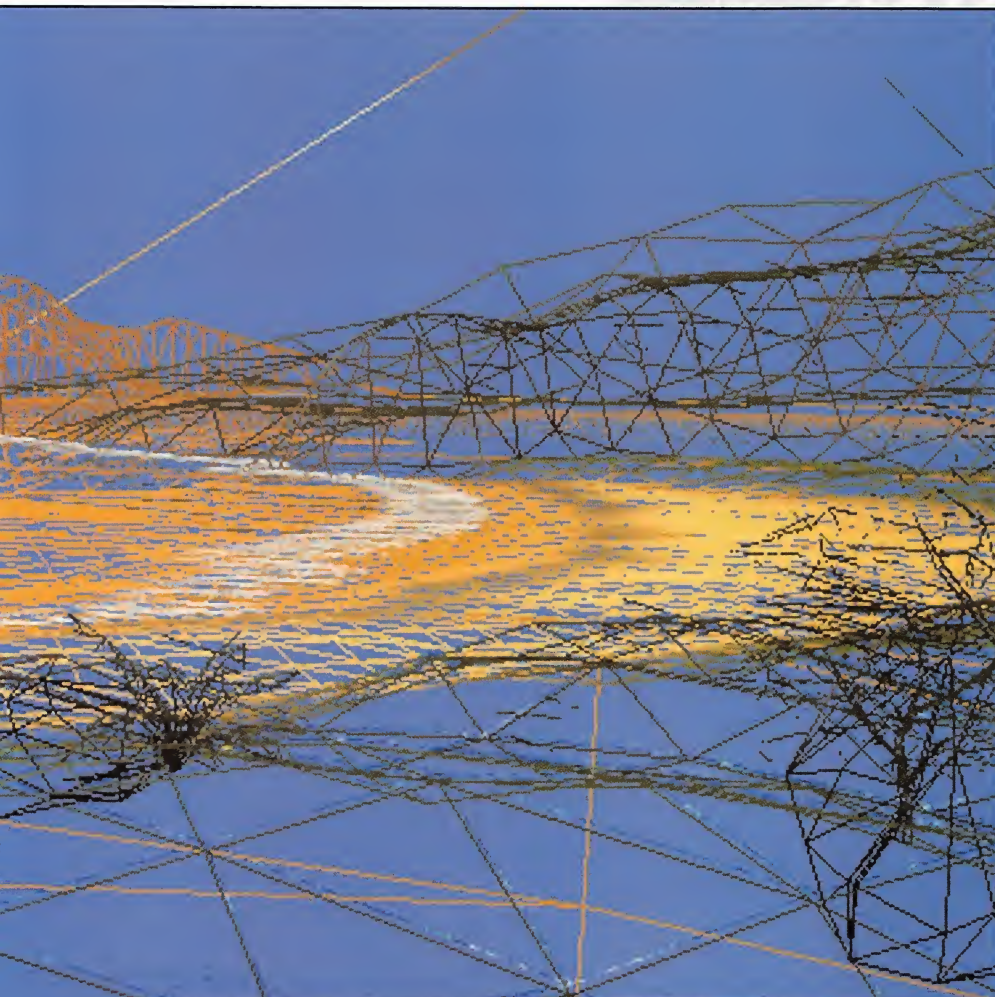
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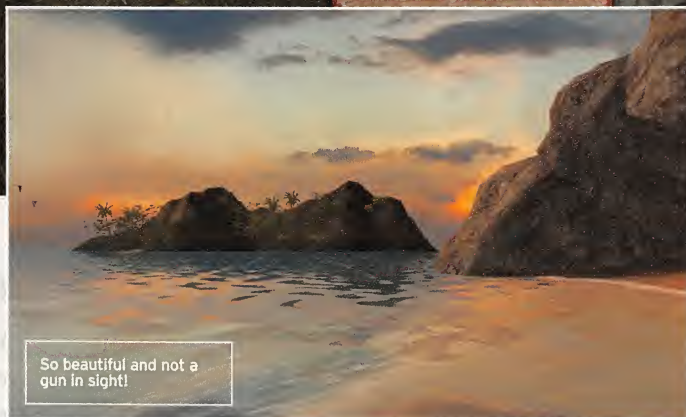
Developer: Crytek **Publisher:** Ubi Soft **Distributor:** Ubi Soft **Due:** Late 2003



In a market glutted with FPS titles, the last thing that would excite the somewhat jaded PCPP staff is another shooter. How wrong we were. Currently being developed by European software house, Crytek, Far Cry has been described as Half-Life meets Halo - a big, beautiful juggernaut of a game that has gathered excellent FPS gameplay, graphic splendour and immediate accessibility, combined them with winning results. Daniel Wilks investigates...



C R Y



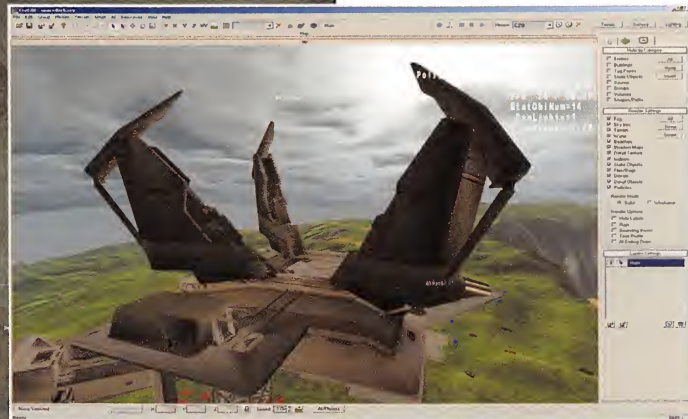
It's easy for journalists to make comparisons between Far Cry and other standout FPS titles, however, Crytek does not accept this tactic and has, instead, thrown a wider cultural net to explain its inspiration for the game.

"We don't like to name game references, but you can be sure we

have played all of the best FPS and stealth games, and have drawn a great deal of inspiration from them", said David Natsumee, producer for Far Cry. "As for other references, we have always seen this as a summer-blockbuster Hollywood sort of action title. Movies like Rambo 2, The Rock and Die Hard really spoke to our macho 'mercs, guns n' explosions' side. In contrast, the Isle of Dr. Moreau and Dr. No were certainly inspirations for the 'strange stuff happening on a tropical island' angle."

As far as plot goes, Crytek is keeping pretty tight lipped at the moment, preferring to release information about style, structure and technology. However, they were willing to give us a few little titbits to whet our collective appetites.

Natsumee reveals, "Jack Carver, the hero, has left his mysterious and bitter past behind and dropped out of society to run a charter boat business in the South Pacific. He is hired by a beautiful journalist to secretly take her to an uncharted island in Micronesia. The game begins as Jack's boat is destroyed by



mercenaries and he is stranded on the island. He must find the journalist, help her foil the plans of the evil Dr. Krieger and his loyal minions, and get off the island alive."

Okay, so now we know what Far Cry isn't. What it is, is a different matter. For a long time, journalists and the gaming community have been longing for a title to push the boundaries of the genre with a style that evolves to become a benchmark. Games like this are few and far between - Doom, Half-Life and Quake 3, but when they do appear they cause people to sit up and take notice. Far Cry looks set to be one of these games for a number of reasons, one being that it looks to solve the oft-mentioned gripes with AI and varied gameplay in FPS games.

When we asked about these changes, Natsumee was forthcoming and said, "Intelligent Systematic AI is probably our most revolutionary change and the one we have spent the most time on because it most directly affects the core gameplay. The AI in our game are completely unscripted; that means they actually respond directly to player actions and know how to use the environment to their own advantage against the player. In most games, the AI are relatively passive, relying on the player to hunt them down and fight them, however, in Far Cry, it is different - once they know you are out there, the AI will actively hunt the player down. Those who have had a chance to play it say it

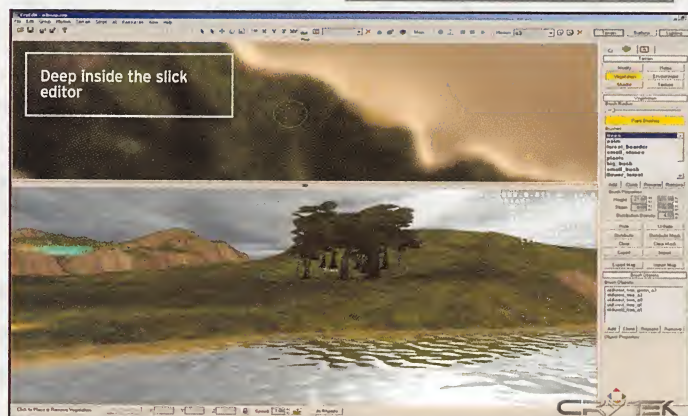
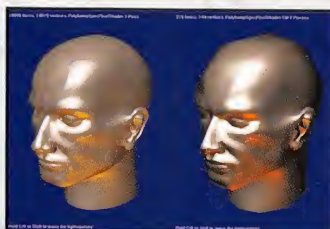
is a completely different experience from other FPS games. This leads not only to a very immersive experience, but it also means a game that can be played over and over and still remain a great deal of fun each time."

The advance in AI has given rise to a number of other features gamers will appreciate. If Far Cry lives up to it's own press, it's unlikely there will be too many complaints of a linear plot that confines players to one strict path with invisible walls. Natsumee elaborated on this effect and said, "To give our AI a nice place to play, we have some truly enormous maps - and all of it is real, not visual tricks and effects. If you see a beautiful island in the distance and want to swim out and see it - go right ahead, nothing stops you. If you want to sneak through the jungle instead of walking down the path and into an ambush, be our guest - but remember - the AI knows they, too, can go anywhere!"

"As we have such vast areas to

NEXT GENERATION GRAPHICS

Far Cry isn't the only game taking advantage of PolyBump technology - the other gaming luminaries due for release around the same time, Doom 3 and Deus Ex 2, have engines also utilising the technique. The impact of PolyBump on games development remains to be seen, but it could mean developers will be able to concentrate on substance rather than pretty graphics engines. PolyBump technology should also mean gamers won't need to have the fastest machines to access the improved graphics.

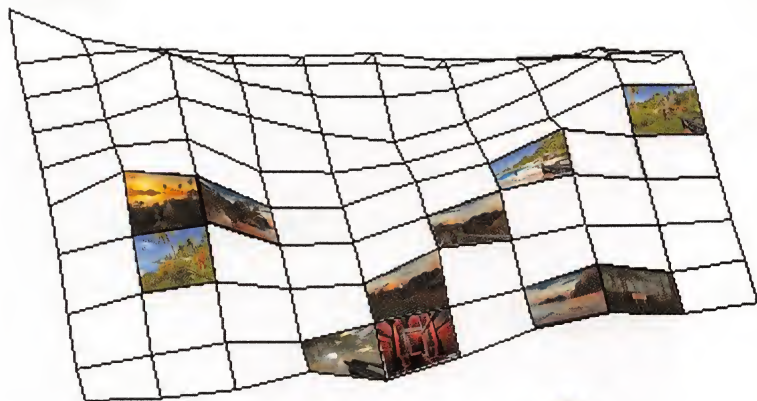


LONG DISTANCE COMBAT

The incredibly long-draw distances seen in the CryEngine tech demo and available on the CD/DVD will allow for a very different style of gaming if players, as it opens the possibility for all combat to be conducted from extreme range. Whilst sniper rifles are a standard component of nearly all modern FPS games, Far Cry could be one of the first to allow for predominantly sniper based combat. Aside from random encounters with enemy patrols and wildlife, players should be able to pick off the vast majority of enemies from a safe distance - that is, if they play their cards right and remain hidden.

see and travel, we made sure the player can affect events over a huge deal of space. For example, using certain weapons the player can shoot great distances, sometimes so far you can't even see the enemies without binoculars. This gives the player a real feeling of power and control, as well as increasing tactical experience. We also provide some great opportunities for the player to use sneaking and stealth tactics in the game. Because the AI are systematically designed, they will respond very differently to player stealth attempts - making them quite fun to play with."

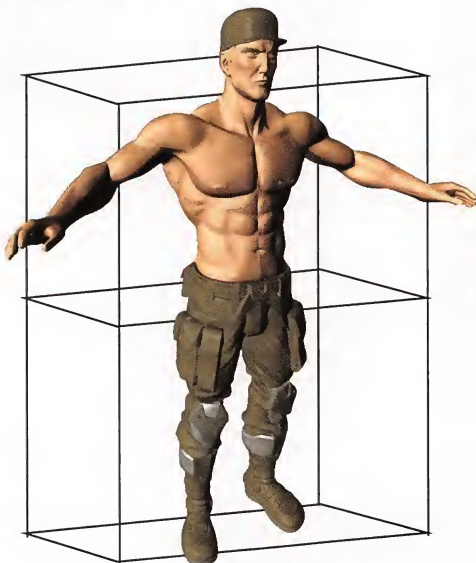
This leads us to the question of how Crytek has handled the tension of non-linearity in a game with a plot, which is essentially impossible as complete non-linearity can not exist where a story is present. To close this



schism, Crytek has developed a play model in which players are presented with a series of non-linear situations within a linear framework.

Natsumee explained, "The best way to think about the game is in 'action bubbles', that is, sections of gameplay 10-15 minutes long. Within those, the player has almost complete freedom of movement. However, to continue a linear narrative, we have made it so these action bubbles are always exposed to the player in a more or less linear order. But don't worry - you'll have plenty of freedom to approach each tactical situation whichever way you want."

Since the release of Halo, drivable vehicles are becoming more of a commonplace occurrence in FPS games. It appears to be more than a game development fad as vehicles give players increased opportunities to develop strategy and move with ease around maps. The recently released Battlefield 1942 serves as an excellent example for this trend - it may not be the first FPS to integrate vehicles but, so far, it is the most successful in blending styles. The addition of vehicles proved to be a massive boon to players as they were given new and interesting ways to kill each other and quickly access

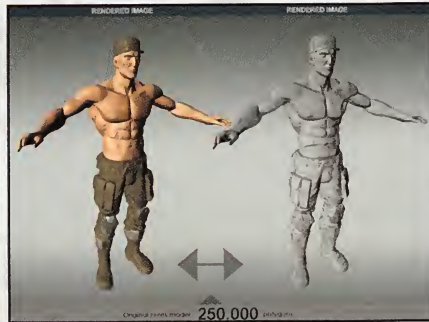


levels. We asked Natsumee if and how they were going to integrate vehicles into the game.

He replied, "We can't tell you everything, but we can reveal you will be able to drive the HMMV, as well as a beach buggy and a few boats. There will also be AI driven

PLAY WHAT YOU SEE

Aside from the massive modding potential of Far Cry, the most exciting thing about the CryEngine and CryEditor is the ease with which new developers or enthusiastic amateurs will be able to construct their own full games. Doubtlessly, Crytek will licence their engine and editor when it is complete and bug-free. It should prove to be a very popular platform because its ease of use and impressive graphical capabilities should appeal to all FPS fans. Don't be surprised to see Modlife pages full of Far Cry mods and total conversions a few months after the game's release.





helicopters, but you won't get to drive those. As our maps are quite large, these vehicles play a pretty big role in the game as transportation devices. Also, some will have big guns attached because there will be times when you will need them."

Alongside driveable vehicles, another commonplace occurrence in recent FPS games is the multiplayer option, despite some games having a predominantly singleplayer angle. Once upon a time, this was not so and singleplayer games used to cater specifically for singleplayer gaming. But as witnessed with the recent backlash at Unreal 2 for not supporting multiplayer, this is now no longer an option. Crytek is tight-lipped about releasing details for multiplayer and Natsumee can only give these details.

"We will support a complete multiplayer game, and are now setting the parameters for number of players and vehicles based on our technological capabilities", he said.

"But the base numbers are looking positive for something like 32 players. We are also working on exactly which modes we will support, but you can be sure that the basics (CTF, Deathmatch, etc.) will be in there. We will also be supporting some special modes to showcase our AI and our massive outdoor environments, which should have a very Far Cry flavour."

Another exciting feature of Far Cry is the new proprietary engine, CryEngine, which is one of the frontrunners in the current race for the most impressive graphics available. At the time of writing, the CryEngine stands beside the Doom 3 engine as the most impressive gaming technology available. What makes the engine so special is a new technology known as PolyBump in which a model built with somewhere around 250,000 polygons for maximum detail (fingers, skin, clothing and hair detail) can be distilled down to an object of around 1500 polygons without losing said detail. Due to the relative newness of the technology, there is currently very little information about the process freely available, but Natsumee did his best to fill us in.

"We can create as detailed a mesh as we want to for any object - hundreds of thousands of polys if we wanted - and then we can store that information as a complex normal-map. We then wrap this map around a simpler object, so that the lighting on the object will fool the eye into

thinking that the object is much more complex than it really is", he said. "As you'd expect, taking a close look at any of the characters in our game will have you realise these characters are about 1,500 polys max, but they are so detailed you can see the curvature of their noses and ears - things that would usually take an order of magnitude for more polys. The end result means we can take a lot of very complex looking objects and draw them to screen very fast, which means we can have such massive, detailed worlds, both indoor and outdoor."

The CryEngine also integrates a new physics engine that will support superior rag dolling. Unlike the rag dolling used in UT 2003, Far Cry will take into account the type of surface the body is on, so you shouldn't expect to see a corpse slowly rolling down a hill or sliding across a supposedly flat surface for minutes on end. The physics engine also supports terrain deformation throughout the game and not limited to particular levels.

Natsumee specifies what the physics engine is capable of. "You will be blowing up dirt in the game. And when you have dug a few holes, you can actually use them to hide in, throw grenades in, etc. I might add our revolutionary 'Physics on Demand' system will actually update the terrain deformation in real time, so objects will immediately fall into these holes seamlessly. It's pretty cool."

Although a fantastic physics engine is bound to impress FPS gamers, a game's success lies in whether it has a dedicated community. There are different ways games can achieve this sense of community - some release freely downloadable missions and upgrades, others offer their engine up for free to be used by new developers.

Far Cry looks like it will gain its community support through user-friendly modding support. As demonstrated in the tech demo, the CryEditor allows players to view levels as they progress. Experienced users should be able to create complex levels in a matter of hours. We asked if it was a conscious development decision on Crytek's part to create a user-friendly editor.

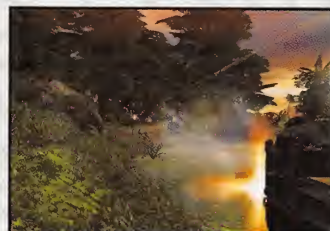
Natsumee answered, "One of the commonly misunderstood things about game development is that game design and asset creation are the biggest hurdles. It's not the case,



in fact, data asset management and development tools are probably the most critical bottleneck in the process. We knew at the beginning that getting the turnaround time from a good idea to something we could actually play was critical, so we developed the 'What You See is What You Play' CryEngine editor as the core of our development process and methodology.

"We knew it would be critical from the beginning, and it has become the complete focal point of our functionality as a company and as a development team. It's a joke in the office that the level building process with the editor is a game in itself - it's a great deal of fun."

As yet, we can't say if Far Cry will be the Half-Life of the noughties or whether it will be the next Daikatana, but we can safely assume all signs point to the former. At the moment development seems to be right on schedule, so we should expect to see Far Cry on shelves either late this year or early 2004.



THUNDER LIZARDS?

Years ago when a very preliminary alpha of Far Cry (at the time called Exile) was demonstrated at E3, spectators were shown a game in which a lone hero had to make his way across a string of islands populated by all sorts of bad guys and animals up to, and including, dinosaurs. Now that Crytek won't announce any real plot details for the game, whether or not there will be giant thunder lizards is open to speculation. Judging by Crytek's comments however, it is far more likely the non-human evil on the island will take the form of Moreau-esque man-beast hybrids and the ultimate evil will be in the form of a deranged scientist who is bent on playing god.

AMERICAN CONQUEST

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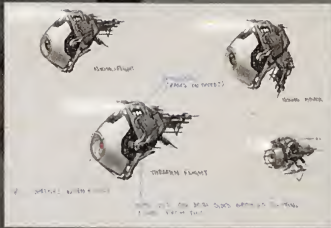
**HALF
LIFE**

**COMES
FULL
CIRCLE**

It's here at last. Valve Software finally wants to talk about Half-Life 2. But do they have anything interesting to say? **David Wildgoose** rides the tram back to Black Mesa...



Developer: Valve Software Publisher: TBA Distributor: TBA Due: Late 2003

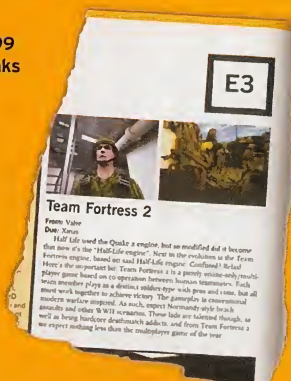


Gordon looks on as the city burns - he's that kinda guy

Signs of life

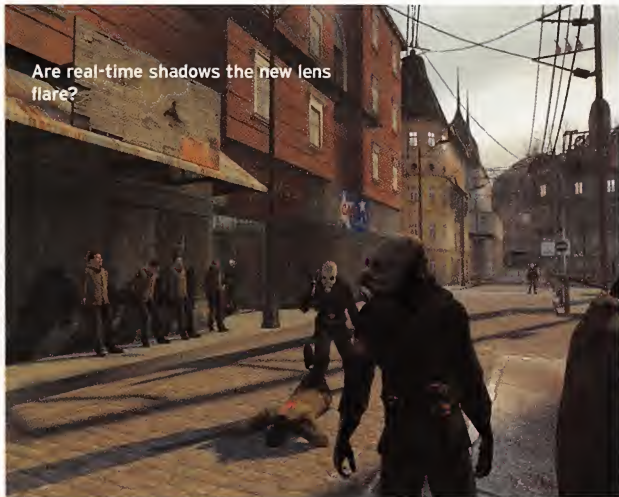
It's been four-and-a-half years since we reviewed Half-Life and a similar length of time since we first covered Team Fortress 2. Now we've finally seen proof of Half-Life 2's existence (which, curiously, briefly appeared on an old Jack of All Games release schedule mid-2001), but what of the once-vaunted TF2? Let's chart the progress of Valve's other project...

1. It's mid-1999 and TF2 sneaks into view...



2. ... A few months later, and that dude's still around...





When Gordon Freeman arrived for work at the Black Mesa facility on that fateful day several years ago, he couldn't have anticipated the extraordinary events that followed. His entire life was not just turned upside down, but imploded through the very fabric of the space-time continuum. It must have come as something of a surprise.

That's exactly the word that describes our reaction upon arriving for work one April morning to discover an email from Valve Software waiting in our inbox. It's not often one of the world's most respected and revered developers deigns to drop you a line. Even more surprising was the subject matter: Half-Life 2.

Yes. Half-Life... 2. Believe it or not, there is a "2" suffixed to that title. Say it to yourself a few times. Half-Life... 2. Half-Life 2. Half-Life2. Sounds good, doesn't it? It rolls off the tongue. In fact, it just seems so perfect. Too perfect. But no, Half-Life 2 is real. It exists.

Valve's working on it - playing it - right now. Right fucking now. And, if all goes according to plan, you'll be playing it in less than four months. Four months! Is that even enough time to get excited? Well, it should be, but much depends on what Valve is going to tell us about it.

Back to that email, then. The subject was Half-Life 2 and an interview with Valve's head honcho, Gabe Newell, and Valve's Director of Marketing, Doug Lombardi, for this very issue of PC PowerPlay. Valve was wondering if we were interested.

We said, "Are you kidding?" and this is what transpired...

PCPP: How long has Half-Life 2 been in development? And what stage of the process is the game at right now?

Gabe Newell: We started pretty much right after we finished Half-Life. With the exception of Yahn Bernier, whose working with Robin Walker on the Team Fortress 2 team, the Half-Life team switched to Half-Life 2 and then we added a bunch of people like Mike Dussault (developer of LithTech), and Gary McTaggart and Charlie Brown (developers of Bioware's Infinity Engine). The engine functionality was frozen last September, and we're planning on shipping September 30 of this year.

Translation: We're in no hurry. We'll ship this game when we're happy with it.

PCPP: How has Valve allocated its resources between Half-Life 2 and Team Fortress 2 and the technology required for both titles?

Newell: After Team Fortress 2 had been in development for a while, I realised I had made a mistake and that Team Fortress 2 was going to need to run on Source, which is the name of the Half-Life 2 engine, rather than on modified version of the Half-Life engine we had originally intended to ship it on. The engine development has been shared between the two teams, but we weren't able to explain that to people since we hadn't announced Half-Life 2 yet.

Translation: We can't talk about Team Fortress 2 either, so don't ask.

PCPP: What lessons did you learn during Half-Life's development that you've been able to put into practice during the development of the sequel?

Newell: We had a lot of things we really wanted to do better that drove the definition of Half-Life 2. The most obvious features are going to be the really sexy stuff like Ken Birdwell's character system, but there is a bunch of under the hood functionality related to things that make MODs easier to write that are also going to be really valuable to the community. Probably the biggest lesson we learned is that we need to aim pretty high and give ourselves the time to get there.

Translation: It's gonna rock.

PCPP: Will you play as Gordon Freeman? Who is the girl in the screens? Is there going to be co-operative play?

Newell: Yes, you are Gordon Freeman again. The woman's name is Alyx, and she's the daughter of one of the people killed in the original events at Black Mesa.

Translation: We won't talk about the story.

PCPP: How does the story of Half-Life 2 relate to the original?

Newell: Well, you learn a lot more about what was really going on, and



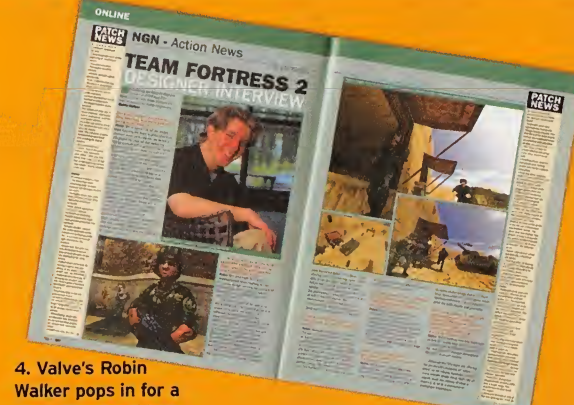
what the G-Man is all about, but other than that, we're going to be pretty limited in our comments about the story, since we want people to enjoy it when they play it.

Translation: No, really, we won't talk about the story.

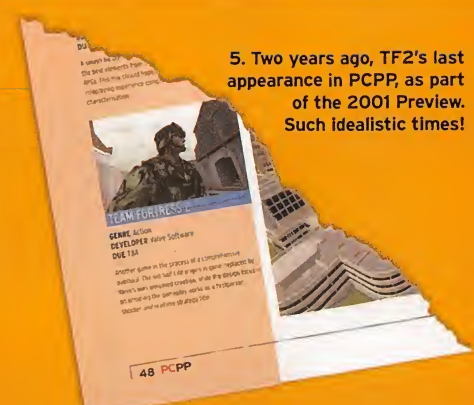
PCPP: Half-Life received considerable acclaim for its cleverly scripted AI. With recent advances in AI technology, how have you approached the implementation of AI in Half-Life 2?

Lombardi: As in Half-Life, you will be dealing with human and alien characters - some friendly, some not. In terms of AI, these characters will be far more agile and have the ability to track you and assist you in ways that weren't possible in the previous generation. Also, in terms of combat,

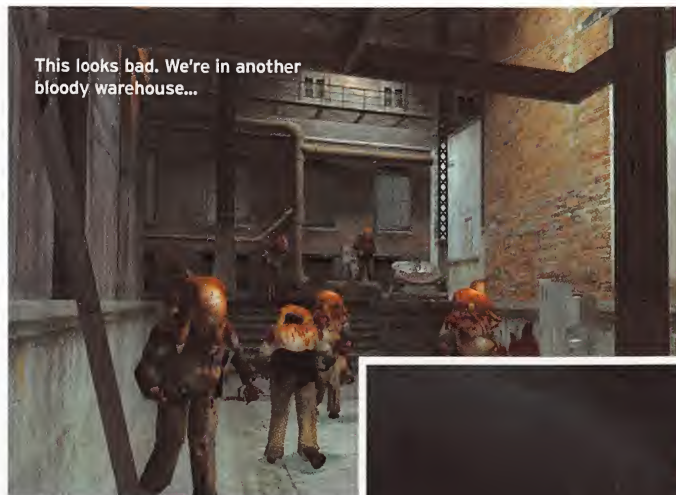
3. ...Later again, this time in a feature with Tribes 2 and Halo!



4. Valve's Robin Walker pops in for a chat. Wonder if he's still smiling?



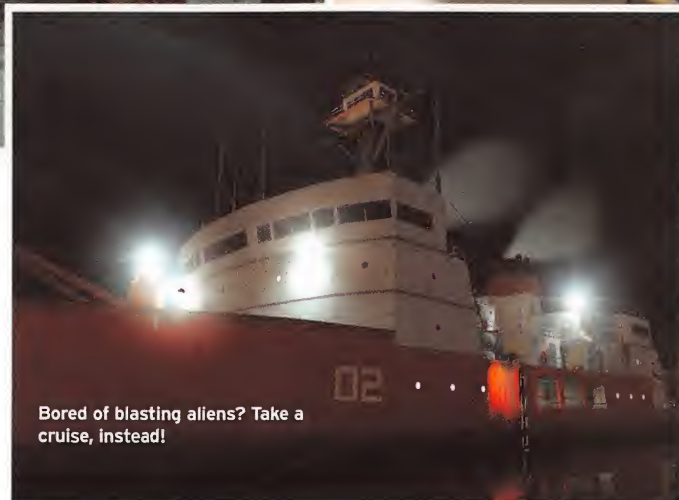
5. Two years ago, TF2's last appearance in PCPP, as part of the 2001 Preview. Such idealistic times!



we're extending the behavior of the original and adding layers that will allow for complex relationships between multiple factions. One of the key advances is in a character's ability to track you - ie pathfinding. They can go anywhere you can go. No longer will scientists follow you to a level transition and then say, "I'll wait here" - they just keep going with you. Also, aliens and non-friendlies can do wild double jumps and more with the new pathfinding system. The other advance on AI is that factions or alliances can be layered. This means if I'm in a scene with an alien and a military person, the alien might not like me but might not like the soldier even more. So there are decisions the AI is making about who poses a bigger threat that adds a layer of complexity to combat and how you want to interact with different characters depending on who/what else may be present.

Translation: The AI is gonna rock, too.

PCPP: The "action movie" pacing and heavily scripted set-pieces were a major factor in Half-Life's success. Will the sequel follow a



similar route in terms of design? How can you replicate that distinctive Half-Life atmosphere while still retaining a freshness of approach?

Lombardi: We will remain true to the basic presentation model of the original, in that all story and information is conveyed within the gameplay, without any stoppages for movies or the like. However, we're achieving this more and more through contextual AI, and less and less through scripted sequences.

Translation: We'll answer your question by not answering your question.

PCPP: Since Half-Life's release, Halo has perhaps most significantly evolved the FPS genre, with its emphasis on open battlefields and combat AI it shifted away from the typical corridor-based

shooter. Has this been an influence on Half-Life 2's design? In which other games have you sought inspiration?

Newell: We pay a lot of attention to what the MOD authors are experimenting with and what our community is saying since they are more likely to be taking interesting risks and pointing towards the future than most mainstream game developers are allowed to be.

Translation: Don't mention Halo.

PCPP: Half-Life was criticised for its final 'alien-themed' levels. Can you reassure our readers that the final levels of Half-Life 2 will be an improvement?

Newell: Well, we need to take risks. It's important to take interesting risks and not just regurgitate Half-Life with better graphics. In Half-Life we tried a more console style gameplay with the jumping and physical navigation pieces of Xen, and we tried to create an interesting art direction for the end of the game. Whoops. There are a lot of reasons why Xen didn't work as well for most Half-Life players as the rest of the game, and I hope we learned from those mistakes. However I think companies in our situation have the luxury of taking risks (and occasionally head planting) rather than just doing what is safe.

Translation: Yeah, sorry about that, won't happen again.

Relative imaginings

So have we learned enough to get excited? Indeed have we learned anything at all, save for the obvious fact that Valve is developing Half-Life 2? Probably not, but that's clearly

Valve's intention. The less they say about Half-Life 2, the more we'll get excited. The fewer, sketchier the details are, the more inclined we are to fill those holes with our own fantasies. In my mind, and yours too, Half-Life 2 is going to be the greatest game ever made. It's going to have everything I - and you - desire in a modern first-person shooter. For me, it's the best bits of Doom, Half-Life and Deus Ex. For you, it's the ultimate amalgam of Duke Nukem, Counter-Strike and Allied Assault. For Anthony, it's Vangers meets Space Tripper meets Iron Storm. And that's the problem: it's a totally different game in everyone's imagination. When it's finally released, and doesn't live up to every single one of our individual expectations, are we going to be disappointed because Valve didn't tell us sooner that Half-Life 2 wasn't what we hoped it might be? Will Valve's publicity strategy backfire? We'll see. But let's not be too harsh on them. After all, they do face the unenviable task of trying to follow-up perhaps the most celebrated PC game of all time. That can't be easy. If Valve is shying away from talking about it, maybe - just maybe - we can understand. It must be a lot of pressure, right Gabe? "I think it's a great opportunity and responsibility," Newell says, in typically cautious style. "It's something we've taken very seriously. We owe it to the fans to do a great game."

Nnnnngh! Okay, they're really not going to let anything slip. I guess we'll simply have to wait until September 30 this year to find out whether Valve has managed to create an experience worthy of the Half-Life legacy.





They're in prison, guys! They're not going to get out!

Feeding on scraps

We asked Valve a whole bunch more questions they simply refused to answer, presumably on the grounds it would involve revealing more - any! - substance than they felt was appropriate. Having said that, we've managed to dig up a few tidbits of actual info for you to chew on:

1. Half-Life 2 takes place sometime after the events at Black Mesa
2. Locations include City 17 (somewhere in Eastern Europe)
3. There are drivable vehicles
4. It will ship with the Hammer editor for mod-makers
5. Some of the Half-Life

characters return (including the G-Man, Barney the security guard, and a few select scientists)

6. You will get cues and signs from characters' facial animation
7. Physics simulation is next-gen. Everything in the world has a property, and can be used to manipulate other things in the world
8. And, er... well, that's about it really. Enjoy!





BAC SCH

JEDI KNIGHT 3:

Developer: Raven Publisher: Lucasarts Distributor: Activision Due: September 2003



K T O O L

Young Master **Anthony Fordham** has always had the force with him, in some form or another. So he was the perfect person to send undercover to Luke Skywalker's new Academy, kind of like Drew Barrymore in *Never Been Kissed*. Except with more Jawas.

JEDI ACADEMY

The first day of school is always a scary kind of time. Especially when the whole place has a weird antiseptic institutional look to it, there are Sandpeople hanging out on the sports oval and the head of Maths is a nine-foot Wookiee. Kids arrive in dribs and drabs, their mums, dads and hermaphrodite parental units strapping on their breather packs and telling the little Sallustians to not let anyone tease them about their huge rubbery lips.

It's the first day of term at Luke Skywalker's Jedi Academy, where aspiring force-adept students from around the galaxy have gathered to begin training to repopulate the nearly extinct Jedi ranks.

The evil Galactic Empire is reeling from the destruction of its second Death Star and the death of its Emperor in the Battle of Endor, and in the resulting power vacuum, the star systems have become unstable and it is up to this school to maintain the peace and rebuild society. Needless to say, your training will be fast-tracked.

Where's Kyle?

Jedi Academy is Lucasart's answer to fans getting bored with the continuing adventures of Kyle Katarn, confused and introspective Jedi adventurer extraordinaire and dispatcher of evil dark side minions unparalleled. Kyle is taking a side role in the new game, appearing alongside Luke Skywalker as an important NPC and teacher of the player character.

Kenn Hoekstra, Project

A PROUD TRADITION

Even though Jedi Academy is labelled as the third in the JK series, there have actually been four notable Jedi games. Indeed, aside from the TIE Fighter space combat series, the Jedi Knight games have been the only other truly admirable example of Star Wars based gaming. All the rest of it was rubbish. Even Rogue Squadron, come on people, really. The first 'Jedi' game, Dark Forces, was released in 1994 and used a proprietary pseudo-3D engine like Doom. Unlike Doom it supported looking up and down, jumping, crouching and more environment interactivity. Unfortunately, it didn't actually include any Jedi.

Its sequel, Dark Forces 2 was subtitled Jedi Knight, and this was where the lightsaber elements came in. Released in 1997 it made up for a somewhat dated Quake-style graphics engine with stellar gameplay and, of course, lightsabers.

Lucasarts quickly realised the Jedi angle was far more popular and dispensed with the Dark Forces label from here on in. Jedi Knight 2: Jedi Outcast was released just last year, using an updated Quake 3 engine and a tonne of new features. Support for voice commands was particularly welcome, but by the end of the game, players were getting a little tired of the by now quite staid antics and attitudes of Kyle Katarn. Which is where the Jedi Academy steps in...

Administrator at Raven, the developer that does the actual code work for Lucasarts, says the remodelling of the game into an Academy framework is all part of rejuvenation the series.

"We really wanted to do something fresh. Now with Academy you have the freedom to choose your Jedi's species, gender, attire, lightsaber handle and lightsaber blade colour. Letting the player create their own Jedi allows them to craft their own game experience than be bound by 'what would Kyle do in this situation' constraints."

That's right, rather than a linear story-based FPS like the previous games, Jedi Academy is set to be much more of a light RPG. The player character has no particular history beyond arrival at the Academy for training, so the player is free to choose their character's race, clothing and lightsaber particulars.

Barbie in space!

At this early stage, Lucasarts is shy about confirming which races will make it into the game, but let's just say we'll be very disappointed if we can't play as a Wookiee or one of those guys with the two big

tentacles coming out of their heads, like Jabba's retainer Bib Fortuna... a Twi'Lek, that was it!

"The character models will not really affect gameplay," says Hoekstra, "other than giving the player the opportunity to personalize his or her player character. Other elements of Jedi Academy, however, will adapt to allow players to suit their own style. Players will be able to choose their Force powers and how they advance in them as well as their lightsaber (single/dual/double bladed) and saber fighting style."

It's all sounding a lot like Jedi Outcast meets Quake 3, with a bigger focus on combat and a faster pace. Lucasarts learned way back in 1997 with the release of Dark Forces 2: Jedi Knight that gamers want lightsabers and they want to be able to replicate the elegant battles, particularly of the two new Star Wars films.

Hoekstra is quick to agree, "The sabre combat model has been vastly expanded. From a combat standpoint, we've pretty well doubled the number of moves (attacks/defenses/jumps/acrobatics) that were available in Jedi Outcast. The sabre combat has been so enriched; it is the true focal point of Jedi Academy."

Lucasarts makes a big deal of lightsaber customisation, with the player able to build their own weapon, one of the central tenets of the Jedi philosophy. What's more, they won't be limited to standard Original Trilogy style sabres, but will also be able to try double-sabre antics like Annikin used in his abortive battle with Count Dooku, and of course Darth Maul's now-famous double-bladed quarterstaff style weapon from The





Phantom Menace.

And as Hoekstra already mentioned, it will also be possible to choose lightsaber blade colour, although there's no word yet on whether red is intrinsically linked to the Dark Side or indeed how wide the colour spectrum will be.

Universe of possibility

But Jedi Academy is not just a combat game, it will also be an adventure with a very generous side helping of RPG elements. Hoekstra explains.

"The RPG elements in Jedi Academy will give the player many more choices of how they want to

FAMOUS JEDI

What's an epic without a cast of characters? Unknown which of these Jedi will make it into the final game, but you can assume since many of them fought in the Clone Wars, as far as Jedi Academy is concerned, they've all been dead for fifty years.

Obi Wan Kenobi

"Who's the more foolish, the fool or the fool who follows him?"

Obviously, everyone knows this fella, endemic as he is to all five Star Wars films. He became a spouter of insufferable platitudes and aphorisms once he hit fifty and had all his mates except the little green one slaughtered by his own apprentice. Managed to once be able to say "You will never find a more wretched hive of scum and villainy" and not sound completely stupid.



Qui-Gon Jinn

"I should've killed that long-eared idiot when I had the chance" Not to be confused with Michael Collins or the XO of doomed Russian submarine K-19, Qui-Gon was probably the most useless of the Republican Jedi since all he did was march about the place telling people he couldn't help them very much. Eventually, got stabbed in the particulars by Darth Maul.



Luminara Unduli

"I could murder a curry"

Not really interesting except that after the fall of the Republic she managed to get work in the film Men in Black where she played the wife of a fleeing alien and beat the living hell out of Will Smith while giving birth to an almost insufferably cute squid creature.



Pablo-Jill

"Mate, from where I'm standing, YOU'RE ugly"

Never managed to get work hosting children's television, which left him bitter and almost caused him to turn to the Dark Side. Being the only representative of his species on the Jedi council or indeed in any of the films, this crabby Ongree was eventually lightsabered to death by a Labrador retriever who got the wrong end of the stick, so to speak.



And then there's of course the wiry **Kit** "I'm stronger than I look!" **Fisto**, our good friend **Barriss** "What test?" **Offee**, the tempting **Aayla Secura**, good old **Stass Allie**, the sacrilegious **Bultar** "Force Shmorce hand me the wrench" **Swan**, and the sensible **Jocasta** "Can I help you with something?" **Nu**, I kid you not.

play the game. Much of the level and mission progression is non-linear and players will be able to choose between the light side and the dark side paths of the Force. Combined with the character and lightsaber creation choices and a few other surprises, these elements add a whole new dimension to the story and the gameplay."

Both Lucasarts and Raven have also promised the player will more than likely run in to a few familiar faces from the Original Trilogy. Unfortunately, there's no word yet on whether the story will stay true to the history of the extended universe popularised in an endless series of post-ROTJ Star Wars novels.

Finally, Jedi Academy also promises to seriously beef up the multiplayer side of the game, with support for unique character models and numerous new gameplay types. Unfortunately, the developer doesn't yet want to elaborate on these, so expect a more detailed examination after E3.

Vital statistics

So, at this stage there's not much else to do except give a bit of a run down on the new technical features Raven is promising for the game. For a start, enhancements to Outcast's Ghoul model modification system, called Ghoul 2 oddly enough, will allow for a massive variety of character animations, and combined with a de rigueur rag doll system should result in some very tasty visuals indeed.

ICARUS 2 is the name of the scripting system and it promises not only complex singleplayer situations, but also scripted events in multiplayer, which could result in some interesting gameplay modes. A shame it's all being kept so secret.

Enhancements to the mapping tools used to create the levels will apparently result in much more detailed 3D environments, including outdoor levels using Raven's ARIOCHE terrain system, which not only has an excitingly foreign sounding name, but also promises highly realistic and detailed landscapes.

Most excitingly, there will be support for numerous vehicles including vehicles that can be ridden, not just driven. And riding in Star Wars means one thing - Speeder Bikes. Oh yeah, mamma, give me some of that sweet Carrie Fisher at 200kph action! Sorry, did I write that or just think it?

Naturally, Raven is building the



game with modders in mind, so expect even more insanely accurate Star Wars stuff to make it in after the game is released.

The long wait

We'll first get our hands on Jedi Academy at E3 and, in fact, we're fairly keen to do so. A quality FPS is always welcome, and when it has authentic Star Wars flavour, a proven track record and double-handed lightsabers, it's a game worth waiting for indeed.

So, power up your favourite pain-in-the-arse comic relief robot and get ready to head back on in to the universe where an entire race of fish-things lets people call them the Mon Calamari and doesn't immediately unleash electric death. And, of course, it goes without saying, may the force be with you.



SUPERHERO



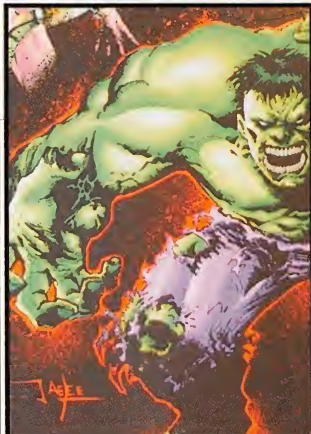
HYPE!

MEANWHILE...

DONNING ON THE PURPLE TIGHTS IS
OUR HERO, DANIEL WILKS, OUT
TO **KAPOW!** AND **WHAMO!** THE HYPE
SURROUNDING SUPERHEROES...



FOR MANY YEARS, HOLLYWOOD HAS BEEN ACCUSED OF FOLLOWING FADS. WHILST THIS IS TRUE FOR THE MOST PART, THE OPPOSITE IS ALSO TRUE - HOLLYWOOD CAN CREATE FADS...



...Unless you've been living under a rock or some other heavy and all encompassing object for some time now, you would have noticed the proliferation of comic book adaptations hitting the screen: X-Men, Spiderman, Spawn, From Hell, Daredevil, Bulletproof Monk and Blade 2 to name but a few. Adaptations of existing comic material has proven to be a pretty lucrative marketing venture - so much so that six of the aforementioned films have already been green-lighted for a sequel. If you guessed the six films

are X-Men, Spiderman, Daredevil and Bulletproof Monk, Spawn and Blade you'd be absolutely correct. Superheroes have become more than the flavour of the month - they've become the flavour of the year, a marketable, exploitable and, more importantly, enjoyable slice of comic book life. The genre has proven so popular, website www.comics2film.com claims there are no less than 604 comic book properties that have been currently considered for film, and this includes releases from 2002 and 2003. Whilst not all of these are superhero titles and the majority of them will

probably go straight to video or cable, it remains comics and superheroes are today's hot property.

It's about now you're probably thinking, "this is PC PowerPlay - what does this have to do with gaming". The short answer is everything. Hollywood creates trends, pop-culture follows those trends and what is gaming, but a reflection of current culture. 2003 is shaping up to be an interesting year in gaming and, like the movies, a good number of releases either feature well known superheroes or characters with superheroinic attributes. Unfortunately, these games are coming into a market a lot harder to crack than the easily pleased cinema-going audience. For a start, the vast majority of films will be saddled with the stigma associated with its film origins, which history has shown is a genre gamers feel is nothing more than an opportunistic cash-in. Examples of failed movie tie-ins are abound, such as Batman, Batman Returns, Spawn, Total Recall, Nightmare on Elm Street, Friday the

13th and, not forgetting the worst game of all time, ET.

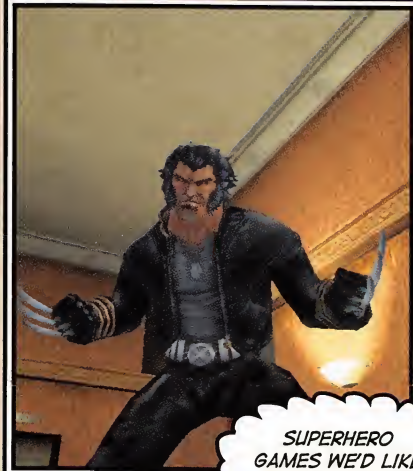
So, what will set apart this new breed of superhero movie tie-in from its failed predecessors? For a start, unlike the games just mentioned, these new games will allow the player to perform actions that make the films so appealing in the first place. In short, the games will allow the player to be a superhero. This may not sound revolutionary, but up until the release of Spiderman for the PlayStation, the vast majority of superhero games were simply shooters, side scrolling beat-'em-ups or, at best, genre bashes featuring a different gaming style for every level. This new generation of superhero gaming is taking advantage of the current hardware crop and offers gameplay with smoothly integrated superpowers, instead of the leveraging used in the past in segments where a certain power has to be turned on to beat the level (Superman, we're looking in your direction).

We have yet to anticipate this year's superhero movies as games, X-Men 2: Wolverine's Revenge, Hulk and Enter the Matrix. Three's a hefty number in one year and if we are to include last year's Spiderman: The Movie, Buffy for Xbox, Superman, Batman: Vengeance and the console releases of Dark Angel, Batman: Dark Tomorrow and Daredevil it's obvious there is a thriving market for superheroinic games.

THQ has recently signed a big money deal with Marvel Entertainment to develop and distribute games for some well-known characters that include The Punisher, which will probably coincide with the upcoming movie based on the same character; Captain America, which is also due to coincide with the upcoming movie; Nick Fury and a new collaborative product called The Call, which will feature many of the better-known characters from the Marvel Universe including Spider-Man and the X-Men. There is currently little detail available about The Call, except we do know both THQ and Marvel claim it's a group enterprise as opposed to a licence agreement. Some sources speculate the game may be an MMORPG developed to go head to head with the recently announced Vivendi MMORPG currently titled Marvel Online. At any rate, the comic will hit stands some time towards the end of this year, shortly followed by a proposed TV series and lastly by the game some time in 2004.



BY THE TIME YOU'RE READING THIS, X-MEN 2 WILL BE TEARING UP THE AUSTRALIAN BOX OFFICE AND CATERING TO EVERY FAN'S DREAM OF A BIG SCREEN VERSION OF THEIR FAVOURITE COMIC...



SUPERHERO GAMES WE'D LIKE TO SEE - PART 1

FLAMING CARROT
THE FOUNDING MEMBER OF THE MYSTERY MEN (THOUGH SADLY ABSENT FROM THE MOVIE OF THE SAME NAME), FLAMING CARROT HAS NO SPECIAL POWERS APART FROM HAVING A HEAD SHAPED LIKE A CARROT, WHICH IS CONSTANTLY ON FIRE. HE ALSO HAS A KNACK FOR ALMOST ZEN-LIKE STUPIDITY.



WHAMMO!

...Unlike the first film, in X-Men 2 pulls its focus away from Wolverine and instead concentrates on the X-Men as a team. The game, on the other hand, converges entirely on the Canadian berserker and his quest to unearth his past. The timing of Wolverine's Revenge has more to do with marketing than the game's resemblance to the film, which is about Wolverine's attempt to stop a viral time-bomb that even his advanced healing wouldn't survive.

The developers had made a good choice in using Wolverine as game's main character as he is not only the most popular of the X-Men, but his skills also complement the medium of computer games. Other characters are either too direct in their powers, for example, Cyclops can shoot beams from his eyes but nothing else, or too abstract, such as Storm who can control the weather and also pretty much anything she sets her mind to. Wolverine, on the other hand, is about direct action and combat sporting effective powers, such as his unbreakable skeleton, adamantium claws that can cut through anything and the ability for fatal wounds to heal quickly. Wolverine's Revenge takes the now well-known third person action/adventure genre and injects superheroic values.

DR. BANNER...

Hulk takes a similar approach to game design as Wolverine's Revenge by placing the hero in a third person action/adventure game, but unlike the X-Men title, Hulk is far more closely related to the film. The game opens with a pivotal sequence from the film and the action takes place immediately after. As such, the success and appeal of the game will rely on the success of the film.

Unlike most other superhero property, however, Hulk is saddled with less cinematic stigma due to a respected director (Ang Lee) having helmed the project. This air of legitimacy should ultimately prove to be the saving grace in the possible face of a mediocre film.

Past examples have ultimately shown that the Hollywood machine and the media supporting it gives more exposure to what could be an average superhero film if it purports a well known director and/or cast than a brilliant film with an unknown director/cast.

THERE IS NO SPOON

Whilst the aforementioned games will undoubtedly be successful due to their nature as a movie tie-in, doubtless the most hotly anticipated game in the current crop of superhero titles would have to be Enter the Matrix. Before anyone starts screaming Matrix was a science fiction film and had nothing to do with superheroes, the first thing

you need to do is look at the tenets of the film.

All of the lead characters in the film displayed superheroic abilities - superhuman speed, strength, skills, the ability to defy gravity and in the case of Neo, the ability to fly (as seen just before the closing credits). You could argue the events occurring in the realm of virtual reality qualifies the film as science fiction, but the argument is rendered moot when you consider the rest of the virtual inhabitants of the Matrix obey all the natural laws - it is only the lead characters that demonstrate the ability to break them.

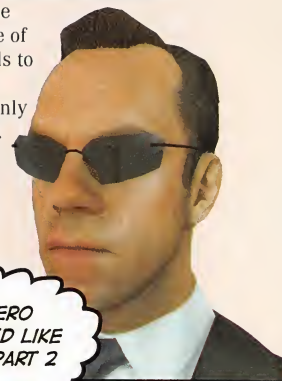
Joel Silver, the producer of the Matrix trilogy sums it up best, "Essentially, the boys [writers/directors the Wachowski brothers] wanted to make Matrix because they wanted to create a superhero movie where the audience would accept superheroes in a way that didn't feel like Saturday morning television. In the first movie, you saw how the world was set up and in the sequels, you're going to see Neo's superhuman powers."

Fundamentally, the same will be true for the games, which will use a science fiction format to make the superheroic actions of the protagonists palatable. Players will be able to perform all the superhuman stunts as seen in the films - bullet-time, bullet dodging, wall running, super jumps, wire-fu - whilst following a plot that runs concurrent to the films. From a marketing standpoint, Enter the Matrix is probably the strongest entrant into the current crop of superhero games for a number of reasons, most notably, the lack of stigma associated with the game being based on the movie. There could be a number of reasons for this missing disability, but the most logical explanation is the film provides the perfect framework for a game and not doing so is a far more damning course of events.

If you look at the big picture, the Matrix is nothing but a very big, very advanced massively multiplayer game

in which every player takes the role of a normal workaday Joe - kind of like The Sims Online without the need to use the toilet so often. The sheer scope of the story background for The Matrix extends the boundaries of game development without needing to rehash the film. What also works in the game's favour is the creation of a whole group of unknown heroes who are residents of the last free city, Zion. Morpheus claims the Nebuchadnezzar (Morpheus's vehicle, the name of an ancient Babylonian king as well as the largest size bottle of Champagne available) is but one of the Zion hovercraft roaming the real world, illegally jacking into the matrix.

The combination of a huge number of unknown heroes and a whole world/mythology to build upon means the developers of the game could construct a game for gaming enthusiasts rather than be constrained by the movie licence. Of course, we still have to wait and see if the final result is going to be a breakthrough game or whether it will simply be another piece of hype that fails to live up to its own press. Only time will tell.



SUPERHERO GAMES WE'D LIKE TO SEE - PART 2

MADMAN
CREATED BY MIKE ALLRED, MADMAN IS A SUPERHERO WHO DOES THINGS. THAT'S ABOUT ALL YOU CAN SAY. HE DOES STUFF AND THEY'RE ALL WEIRD. WHILST IT WOULDN'T MAKE THE MOST PLOT-DRIVEN FILM, IT WOULD BE A DAMN COOL ONE. ANY MADMAN GAME WOULD HAVE TO BE A GRAPHICAL ADVENTURE ALONG THE LINES OF SAM 'N' MAX.



TWO GAMES DUE OUT IN THE NEXT YEAR OR SO THAT HAVE SPURRED THE INTEREST OF BOTH SUPERHERO FANS AND GAMES ARE CITY OF HEROES AND MARVEL ONLINE...



...Though both games are MMORPGs, each takes a different approach to the art of the superhuman. Using the extensive Marvel Universe as its setting, Marvel Online will feature hundreds, if not thousands of well-known Marvel characters.

AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!

It's unknown at this stage if players will be able to take the role of their favourite hero, but the idea seems highly unlikely as the only feasible way it could be decided who would get to play fan favourites such as Spider-Man, Hulk, the X-Men, Punisher, The Avengers or Iron Man would be a logistical mess. Conceivably, there



could be an auction to see who would pay the most to get their favourite character. It's far more likely that the Marvel characters will feature as NPCs like skill trainers, points of contact for missions, sources of information, victims or, in the case of villains, the big mob that groups need to take down at the end of a mission. This approach to the game comes with both its own marketing merits and flaws. On the positive side, comic book collecting is a massively popular hobby and brings with it a large install base of collectors and fans. Exactly how immense this base is can be seen in Marvel's 2002 retail turnover of around (US)\$2 billion with sales up 30% from the previous year. Unfortunately, the use of an established universe with around 40 years of history also makes the game less accessible to new players unknowledgeable of characters' background and skills. On the other hand, developers may attempt to simplify the complex history of the characters for new gamers at the risk of alienating comic book fans. Whatever approach the developers take remains to be seen, but more details should be emerging in the next few months.

City of Heroes has taken the opposite approach in creating an MMORPG universe and slowly developing the history of Paragon City in the City of Heroes concurrently with the development of the game and posting it on the website. This allows those who are interested to send feedback and ideas from woe to go. We should be seeing the game on shelves at the end of the year.

Superheroes are perfectly suited

PAINKILLER JANE

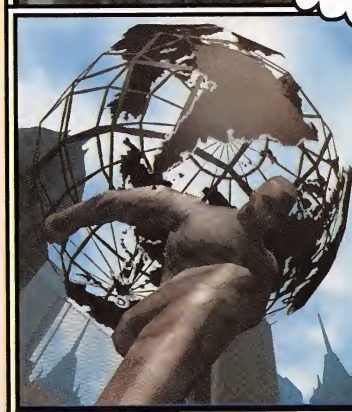
OFTEN CALLED A FEMALE PUNISHER, PAINKILLER JANE IS A FANTASTIC CHARACTER IN HER OWN RIGHT. ALTHOUGH SHE CANNOT BE KILLED BY NORMAL MEANS, JANE BELIEVES SHE IS HORRIBLY DISFIGURED FROM ALL HER INJURIES WHEN, IN FACT, SHE HAS NO SCARS WHATSOEVER.



to the Massively Multiplayer genre. They both share the concept of groups of extraordinary people who must band together to defeat an evil threatening the world/city/nation/neighbourhood, etc. They also avoid the problem of linearity as Massively Multiplayer games, by definition, could not support a linear story, which would necessitate all players logging onto the server at the one time. Instead, MMORPGs opt for a more episodic approach to plotting, giving players the chance to tackle the missions and events of the game in their own time and in the order they so desire. This method allows players to act like superheroes - banding together to fight evil or going off solo to fight crime in dangerous areas, which is essentially the same as XP farming in any other MMORPG. PvP combat will also play a part in both games - ultimately, there's nothing that defines the superhero genre more than epic battles between two superhumanly powerful opponents.



**SUPERHERO
GAMES WE'D LIKE
TO SEE - PART 3**



SIN CITY LIKE THE BEST NOIR NOVELS, THE SIN CITY SERIES IS FILLED WITH HARD-DRINKING MEN WHO THINK WITH THEIR FISTS AND LET THEIR GUNS DO THE TALKING, AND DAMES YOU WOULD KILL OR DIE FOR - OFTEN BOTH. THE SIN CITY UNIVERSE IS RIPE FOR A FILM, UNFORTUNATELY THE LEVEL OF SEX AND VIOLENCE IN THE COMICS PRECLUDE ANY CURRENT FILM TREATMENT.





THIS RAISES THE BIG QUESTION: WHY ARE SUPERHEROES BECOMING SO INFLUENTIAL IN POPULAR CULTURE?



There is no one argument that explains what is propelling this cultural shift, but gaming industry analysis can be broken into two categories of perspective: the cynical and the romantic. The cynical view boils down to Hollywood's lack of creative innovation and to maintain that moneymaking furnace burning is buying intellectual property. If we are to further this stance and argue that "popular culture" is driven by mindless and greedy drones following the US, then consider how to answer this basic question this simplistic line of reasoning does not satisfy: why does Hollywood see in the Superhero genre that makes it a viable money spinner?

The more romantic theory is entwined with the current cultural climate: in a time of international upheaval and strife, people instinctively search for heroes and symbols that mere mortal heroes whose histories have proven to be fallible and, therefore, unable to measure up to audience desires for trust in leadership. Superheroes are by nature larger than life and, as such, are the perfect platform for

rallying political propaganda without suffering the same consequences that befall politicians. Superman, whom fans and collectors consider as the last bastion of truth, justice and the American way, can use the same political rhetoric expressed by someone in the White House to even greater effect. The first acknowledged comic book superheroes fought along side allied troops against the Nazi scourge and proved to be a popular symbol for the fighting spirit. It stands to reason that history has repeated itself and the past usage of superheroes as an image for a fighting cause has now been reused during a time when the US and its Coalition of the Willing are battling against the perceived threat of terrorism.

However, if you throw aside the star spangled banner, what you'll find is the almighty greenback staring back at you. Sometimes sentiment can cast a rosy glow over the Hollywood machine, but remind yourself that when games are coupled with Hollywood, everything comes down to the successful profits and everything else has to fall alongside happily.



SUPERHERO GAMES WE'D LIKE TO SEE - PART 6

SECTION 8

SECTION 8 IS A SUPERHERO TEAM CREATED FOR THE HITMAN COMIC BOOK. SECTION 8 COMPRISES SOME OF THE FUNNIEST CHARACTERS EVER: SIX PACK - A DRUNK WHO GLASSES PEOPLE. HIS SYMBOL IS ONE OF THOSE PLASTIC THINGIES THAT KEEP THE CANS TOGETHER. JEAN DE BATON DE BATON - THE FRENCHMAN IN THE WORLD, JEAN HITS EVIL WITH THE FULL POWER OF BEING VERY FRENCH.

SHAKES - HE HAS A BAD CASE OF THE DT SHAKES. THAT'S IT.

BUENO EXCELLENTE - A GROTESQUELY OVERWEIGHT AND SWEATY MEXICAN WHO FIGHTS EVIL WITH THE POWER OF PERVERSION.

THE DEFENESTRATOR - A LARGE MUTE WHO THROWS PEOPLE OUT OF WINDOWS. TO MAKE THINGS EASIER HE OFTEN CARRIES AROUND A WINDOW OF HIS OWN.

DOG WELDER - AN INSANE VIGILANTE WHO DISSUADES PEOPLE FROM A LIFE OF CRIME BY WELDING DEAD DOGS TO THEIR HEADS.

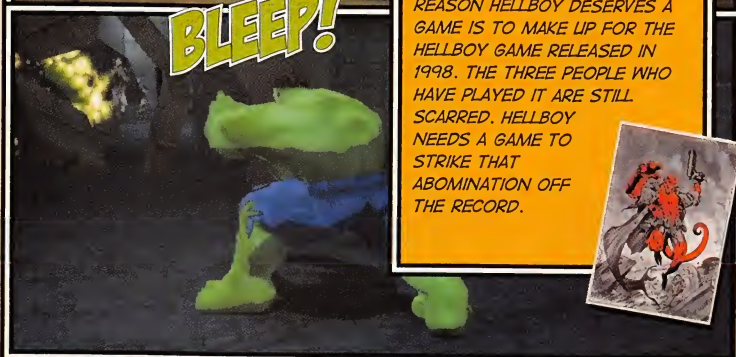
FRIENDLY FIRE - ABLE TO SHOOT POWERFUL BEAMS FROM HIS HANDS, BUT MUCH LIKE THE AMERICAN ARMY SEEMS INCAPABLE OF HITTING ANYONE APART FROM ALLIES.



SUPERHERO GAMES WE'D LIKE TO SEE - PART 5

HELLBOY

THE HELLBOY MOVIE HAS BEEN IN PRODUCTION FOR ALMOST A YEAR NOW AND IS DUE FOR RELEASE MID 2004. THE REASON HELLBOY DESERVES A GAME IS TO MAKE UP FOR THE HELLBOY GAME RELEASED IN 1998. THE THREE PEOPLE WHO HAVE PLAYED IT ARE STILL SCARRED. HELLBOY NEEDS A GAME TO STRIKE THAT ABOMINATION OFF THE RECORD.



SONY

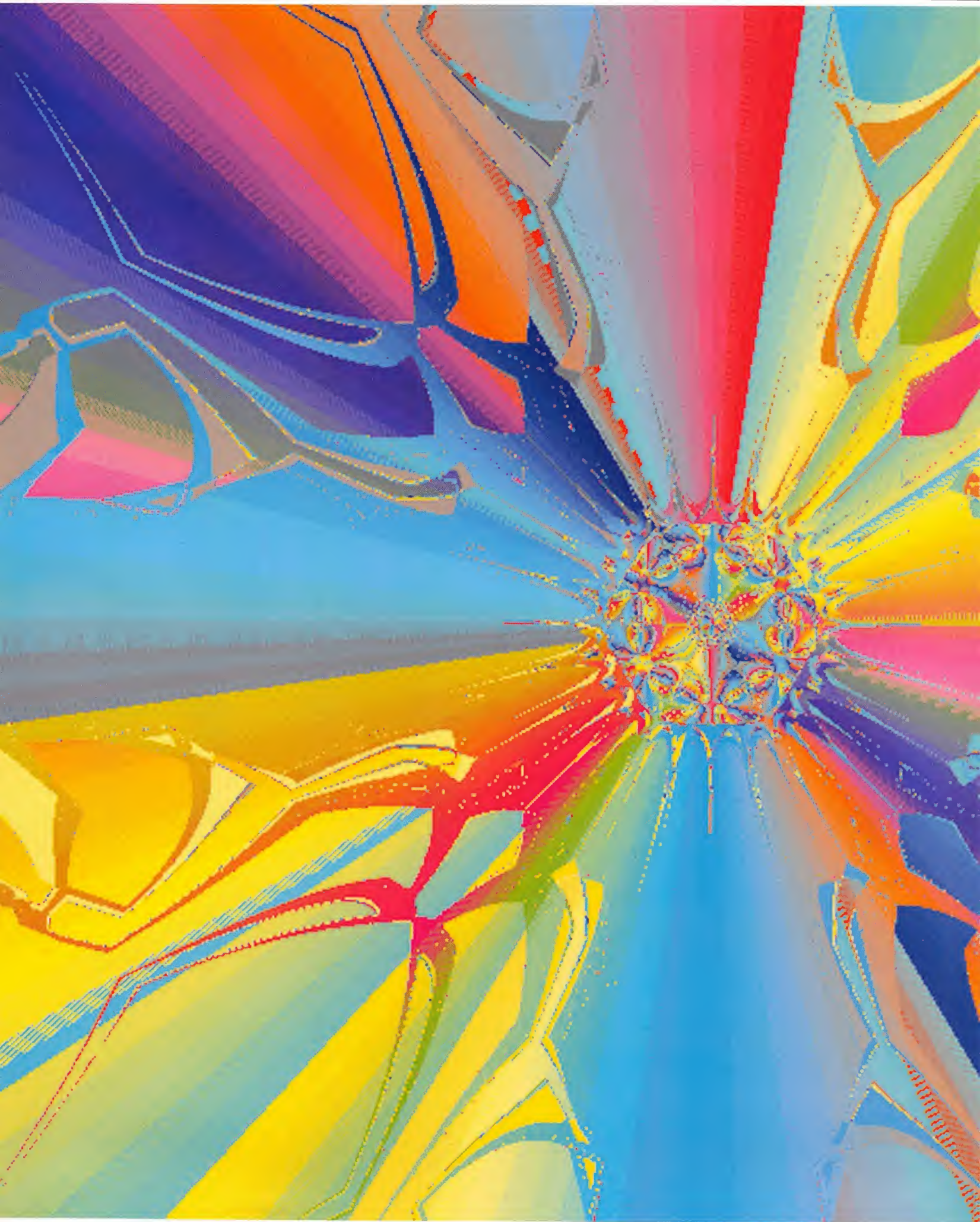


With the new multi-format* DVD Burner, compatibility is no longer a problem.

By supporting the popular DVD formats (± R/RW) in a single drive, Sony gives you flexibility no matter what the task at hand. Turn your home movies into DVDs, make custom CDs, and save your DVD data at speeds up to 4X. Complete with its own software, it's easy to see why the DRU-500A is the perfect match for any home or office set up. Visit us at www.sony.com.au or call 1300 13 SONY (7669)

*Supports DVD-R, DVD-RW, DVD+R, DVD+RW, CD-R and CD-RW recording





DISCO FUEGO

The coming of age of DVD writers with **Stuart Calvin**

If there's one thing I try to convince people in the pages of Setup, it's they should back up regularly. Over the last eighteen months however, I've realised that demand was occasionally unfair. After all, most people now have several gigabytes of vital data full of sentimental value, and backing that lot up to CD is tedious, and backing up to anything other than optical is hideously expensive.

Of course, we now have a viable format out there capable of holding more than seven times as much as a CD, and that's just the standard single-sided version. I'm talking about DVDs of course, champion of the local video store and banisher forever of the wobbly soundtrack from such epic films as *Lawrence of Arabia*.

DVD writers have been available for a year or so now and we last took a look at a batch back in PCPP#79. Even as recently as this, they were plagued by problems, such as really long lead in and lead out times and, of course, they were also plagued by price.

Well, prices are falling, lead times are falling too, and the DVD writer will soon be essential kit for all PC completists. Imagine, being able to back up 4.7GB of stuff in one fell swoop. Burning entire movies without any compression. Consigning 1000-song MP3 collections to eternity. It's all here with the DVD writer.

Unlike CD though, DVD drives are hugely complicated and offer a number of different formats beyond simple DVD-R and DVD-RW. The capacity of discs also varies, from single-sided single-layered discs all

the way up to double sided monstrosities that can really pack it away.

And media is also more expensive per disc than CD. Obviously, it holds seven times as much, so if you pay a price that's more or less seven times greater, you're not really getting ripped off. But beware: it, therefore, follows that coastering a DVD is the same as coastering seven CDs. Avoiding a burn failure is paramount, and our reviews of the following nine drives should help you make an informed choice about which DVD writer best deserves your hard-earned dollars.

So, unwrap a tasty parcel of burning goodness, and set the thermostat to FUEGO!



HOW WE TESTED

Our testing process was typically exhaustive. Verbatim very generously gave us a lovely big pack of DataLife Plus DVDs, thus saving us a considerable amount of cash. We used a 933MHz Pentium 3 in the test machine, and Nero Burning ROM was our burning software of choice. We did 4.4GB data compilation for the DVD-R drives, and a 4.296GB compilation

for the DVD-RAMs. Naturally, both compilations had nested folders off the one disk. We also tested the various write speeds, focusing on 4x for the +R and -R modes, 2.4x for the +RW and 1x (eeek) for the -RW. Don't say we don't suffer for you. Basically, if there's anything else that can be tested with these drives, it ain't worth testing! Now get into it!

ASUS DRW-0402P -R/-RW

■ Price: \$474 ■ Distributor: Synnex ■ URL: www.synnex.com.au

Adopting the dash DVD formats recognized by the DVD Forum, the DRW-0402P offers 4X DVD-R (roughly equivalent to 36X CD-R), 2X DVD-RW, 12X DVD-ROM, 16X CD-R, 8X CD-RW and 32X CD-ROM. It features Buffer Underrun Error Prevention for recording and is UDMA33 supported. All writing modes (Disc At Once, Session At Once, Packet, etc) are supported. This unit is suspected to be a rebadged

Pioneer A05, but with the addition of Disc At Once recording. It completed a -RW write at 1X in 57:20 and a -R write at 4X in 14:44. Like all dash writers it took 2:00 on-the-fly to erase a -RW disc in a 4400MB Nero version 5.5.10.20 compilation. The ASUS also suffers from the -RW, 60-90 second delay, in writing the Lead Out at the end of the recording. It coped easily with the Verbatim test DVD discs. A nice quiet unit.

PCPP Score

Power: 4 Value: 4 Extras: 3



LaCie DVD -R/-RW

■ Price: \$528 ■ Distributor: LaCie ■ URL: www.lacie.com.au

It's well known that LaCie repackages Pioneer units and this writer is a DVR-105 in the dash format. It offers 4X DVD-R, 2X DVD-RW, 12X DVD-ROM, 16X CD-R, 8X CD-RW and 32X CD-ROM. It features a Buffer Underrun protection for recording and is UDMA33 supported. All writing modes (Disc At Once, Session At Once, Packet etc) are supported. It completed a -RW erase and write at 1X in 59:27 and

a -R write at 4X in 14:47. Like all dash writers it took 2:00 on-the-fly to erase a -RW disc in a 4400MB Nero version 5.5.10.20 compilation. The LaCie also suffers from the -RW, 60-90 second delay, in writing the Lead Out at the end of the recording. It coped easily with the Verbatim test DVD discs and is differentiated from the Pioneer packaged units by a good software bundle. This quiet and unobtrusive drive works as advertised.

PCPP Score

Power: 4 Value: 3 Extras: 4



LG Super CD/DVD ReWriter -R/-RW

■ Price: \$435 ■ Distributor: Various Outlets ■ URL: www.lg.com.au

The GMA-4020B is a remarkable unit providing the normal dash R/RW formats as well as DVD-RAM, but without the hassle of a caddy or housing to get in the way. Unfortunately, it does not run in Ultra DMA mode and does not feature high write speeds. Nevertheless, the flexible combination of technologies will interest many people. It offers 2X DVD-R, 1X DVD-RW, 10X DVD-ROM, 12X CD-R, 8X CD-RW and

32X CD-ROM. It also features Buffer Underrun Error Prevention technology. All supports all writing modes (Disc At Once, Session At Once, etc). It features digital audio output too. It completed a RAM write in 1:06:02, a -RW erase and write at 1X in 56:47 and a -R write at 2X in 28:44. Like all dash writers it took 2:00 on-the-fly to erase a -RW disc. This time around long Lead In/Lead Out times for DVD-RAM are past.

PCPP Score

Power: 3 Value: 4 Extras: 4



Panasonic LF-D521E RAM -R/-RW

■ Price: \$499 ■ Distributor: Through 132600 ■ URL: www.panasonic.com.au

This Multi Recorder is another remarkable UDMA33 unit providing the normal dash R/RW formats as well as cartridge DVD-RAM. Although the unit does not feature high write speeds it again features some flexible combination of capabilities will interest people who seek the robust technology of DVD-RAM. It offers 2X DVD-RAM and 2X DVD-R, 1X DVD-RW, 12X DVD-ROM, 12X CD-R, 8X CD-RW and 32X CD-ROM. It also features

Buffer Underrun Error Prevention technology. It completed a 4296MB RAM write at 2X in 58:53, a -RW erase and write at 1X in 59:12 and a -R write at 2X in 29:58. Like all dash writers it took 2:00 on-the-fly to erase a -RW disc prior to writing. DVD-RAM technology supports a wide range of disc sizes to suit all applications as well as format types for different operating systems. A great unit for the safety of any data.

PCPP Score

Power: 4 Value: 4 Extras: 4



Panasonic SW-9571 RAM -R/-RW

■ Price: \$439 ■ Distributor: Panasonic ■ URL: www.panasonic.com.au

This terrific IDE/ATAPI unit is more often seen as a popular OEM peripheral in a USB or FireWire housing. It is a UDMA66 device and featured with a Buffer Underrun Error Prevention technology ensures that any data is safely burnt and stored. It offers 2X DVD-RAM and 2X DVD-R, 1X DVD-RW, 12X DVD-ROM, 12X CD-R, 8X CD-RW and 32X CD-ROM. It completed a 4296MB RAM erase and write at 2X in 57:32, a -RW

erase and write at 1X in 59:02 and a -R write at 2X in 29:53. Like all dash writers it took 2:00 on-the-fly to erase a -RW disc prior to writing, however a DVD-RAM erase is almost instantaneous. DVD-RAM technology supports a wide range of disc sizes to suit all applications as well as format types for different operating systems. This is another unit to trust with your data or DVD backups.

PCPP Score

Power: 4 Value: 4 Extras: 5



Mitsubishi Electric Diamond Data +RW-A1

■ Price: \$599 ■ Distributor: Mitsubishi Electric Australia ■ URL: www.mitsubishi-electric.com.au

Adopting the plus DVD formats the DVDRW6002 offers 2.4X DVD+R and DVD+RW, 8X DVD-ROM, 12X CD-R, 10X CD-RW and 32X CD-ROM. It features BurnProtection Buffer Underrun technology for recording and is UDMA33 supported. All writing modes (Disc At Once, Session At Once, etc) are supported. It completed a +RW erase and write at 2.4X in 23:28 and a +R write at 2.4X in 24:52. Like all plus writers

it takes mere seconds on-the-fly to erase a +RW disc in Nero. Another fuss-free IDE/ATAPI unit that does everything asked of it. It's packaged with useful quality software and it features digital audio output, too. Like all the other writers on test it had no problems with the Verbatim DVD discs. Although appearing a little slow on the CD/DVD-ROM side of things, it a quality unit that should not disappoint. Good enough DVD write speeds for me.

PCPP Score

Power: 4 Value: 4 Extras: 3



AOpen EHD-2412U +RW/+R

■ Price: \$699 ■ Distributor: AOpen ■ URL: www.aopen.com.tw

A very quiet and smooth looking external USB2.0 unit that works as advertised. Adopting the plus DVD formats the EHD-2412U offers 2.4X DVD+R and DVD+RW, 8X DVD-ROM, 12X CD-R, 10X CD-RW and 32X CD-ROM. It features Ricoh's JustLink Buffer Underrun Error Prevention for recording and is UDMA33 supported. All writing speeds are conducted using Constant Linear Velocity and all writing modes (Disc At Once,

Packet etc) are supported. This unit is suspected to be a rebadged Pioneer A05, but with the addition of Disc At Once recording. It completed a +RW erase and write at 2.4X in 23:36 and a +R write at 2.4X in 23:38. CloneCD and Nero reported the unit as a DVRW2412P, after all it's just an IDE/ATAPI unit in a box with smarts. Like all plus writers it takes mere seconds on-the-fly to erase a +RW disc in Nero. I'd love one!

PCPP Score

Power: 4 Value: 4 Extras: 4



Sony DRU-500A +RW/+R

■ Price: \$699 ■ Distributor: Sony ■ URL: www.sony.com.au

Another terrific unit, but extraordinary for its ability to write all dash and plus formats. Sony has recently released another Firmware upgrade (2.0F) that allows the dual-drive to record at 4X on 4X compatible DVD_R media. These more recent upgrades make this drive less of pig with varying media, but it had no problems at all with the Verbatim DVD media - it ate up all

the dash R/RW and plus R/RW I threw at it. It completed a +RW erase and write at 2.4X in 22:39 and a +R write at 4X in 16:13. It recorded similar times in its dash R/RW roles. Like all plus writers, it takes mere seconds on-the-fly to erase a +RW disc in Nero. It features digital audio output too. This unit is a good each way bet and improves the chances of compatibility with other players. A great unit.

PCPP Score

Power: 4 Value: 3 Extras: 4



NEC ND-1100A +R/RW

■ Price: \$599 ■ Distributor: Bluechip ■ URL: www.bluechipit.com.au

Adopting the plus DVD formats the NEC offers 4X DVD+R and 2.4X DVD+RW, 12X DVD-ROM, 16X CD-R, 10X CD-RW and 40X CD-ROM. It features Buffer Underrun Error Prevention for recording and is UDMA33 supported. All popular writing modes like Disc At Once, Session At Once, Track At Once, etc are supported. It completed a +RW erase and write at 2.4X in 23:43 and a +R write at 4X in 14:04. Like

all plus writers, it takes mere seconds on-the-fly to erase a +RW disc in Nero. I tried some other branded media on the NEC and it didn't miss a beat with four different brands of discs. Overall, this unit provided the fastest speeds across the spectrum of CD/DVD media. Another fuss-free and unobtrusive unit with a good software bundle. It, too, features a digital audio output in addition to Line Level. A unit difficult to fault.

PCPP Score

Power: 5 Value: 4 Extras: 5



If it doesn't do
DVD-RAM



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How to destroy your PC!

A handy field guide



As PCs become smarter, more mainstream and even more popular, the casual destruction that was once so easily wrought is becoming more and more difficult to achieve. **Anthony Fordham** takes a look at some quick and easy ways you can ruin your \$3000 investment, using ordinary tools around the house.



Once upon a time, it was possible to destroy your entire machine simply by turning it on incorrectly. Delete a single file from an apparently innocuous directory and it would refuse to boot. Zap the poor thing with the tiniest of static charges and it would be ruined for all time. Hit it with an itty-bitty power surge and the PSU would explode, peppering your face with molten solder and shattered ceramic capacitors. Those were the days.

Today, however, it is becoming progressively more difficult to ruin a well set up PC. Callous inventions such as power leads that only go in one way, good labelling on motherboards, even Windows XP all must take the blame for a smarter, more indestructible machine. Don't lose heart though, as with a little know-how and some gritty determination, you'll find it easy enough to ruin your PC. The trick is that you have to be smart, and to be smart you need to be educated - and this guide will indeed educate.

Under construction

NOTE: This part of the guide presumes you are building a PC from scratch. If you have a pre-built PC, please skip to the next section Your PC At Home.

The best place to begin PC destruction is during actual construction. You can get startlingly effective results just by using an electric screwdriver.

During construction, you have



two choices. First, you can destroy components as you go - this guarantees PC inoperability, but won't necessarily provide that famous fat blue spark dedicated vandals crave. Alternatively, you can build the PC in such a way that when you do finally turn it on, a sort of domino effect ensues, with much satisfying blue smoke and grinding noises from the hard drives - the disadvantage of this method is that new fail-safe measures may save components you were intending to fry.

1. Preparations

Before you even begin though, ensure you are wearing synthetic-soled shoes on a synthetic carpet. Have your favourite tap dancing album playing on a nearby stereo and shuffle along to a few steps. This makes it certain you will be carrying a significant static charge.

Next, unwrap the power supply from its box and immediately plug it into the nearest power outlet. If this outlet already has two double



adaptors and a powerboard hanging off it and is running your fridge, microwave, several Scandinavian-style standing lamps and your stereo, so much the better. You should conduct all PC construction and maintenance with the PSU plugged in and powered up to ensure the highest chance of PC destruction and even personal electrocution and death.

Proceed to build your PC according to your own know-how. Do not consult any manuals for proper jumper settings or other suggested precautions. The following list of components gives specific tips on how to destroy these critical elements of the PC.

2. The CPU (Intel & AMD)

First, make sure the motherboard has already been mounted in the case, preferably backwards. All boards now use a Zero Insertion Force system to install the CPU, sadly making it impossible to mount it the wrong way around. However, you can best damage the CPU by first trying to force it into the socket without lifting the ZIF locking arm.

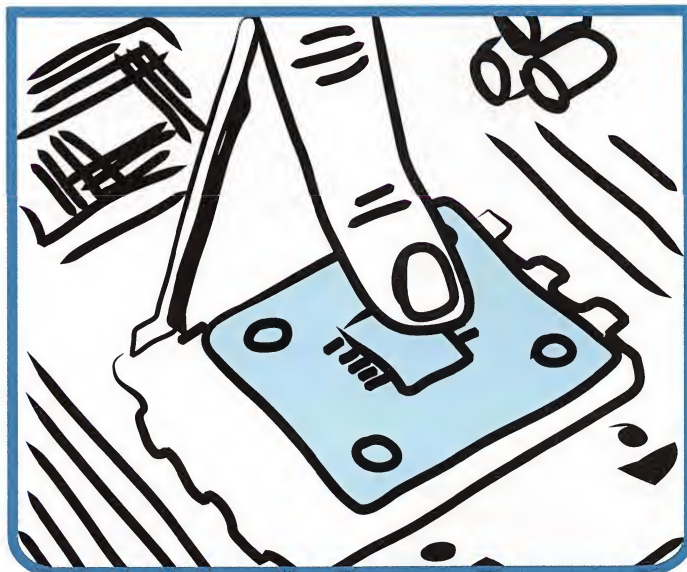
If any of the delicate pins on the underside of the CPU are bent, immediately straighten them using a large blunt object such as a butterknife. If any of the pins snap off, congratulations. This is a good result.



3. Heatsink and Fan

Installation of this component offers ample opportunity to not only gouge yourself on sharp edges, but also 'crunch' the CPU. If your ham-fisted manipulation of uncooperative heatsink clips grinds off the corners of the CPU heat spreader on the PCB, you will have created a thermally unstable processor that may not work at all, may work only at certain frequencies, or may lock up for no apparent reason. This is good.

If you are unable to crunch the core, or find this method too working-class, simply ensure the heatsink has been secured in a crooked position and actually sits a very small distance above the CPU, rather than touching it. If you can look at the motherboard side-on and see daylight between the CPU





Thunderstorms

Much has been written on the effectiveness of thunderstorms in destroying an irritatingly stable PC. Unfortunately, much of the exciting stuff - lightning strikes, power surges - has only an astronomical chance of actually occurring.

A big power surge can have spectacular effects, including, but not limited to, billowing blue smoke and the acrid smell of fried electronics. Unfortunately, arranging such a surge is becoming progressively more difficult as residential power systems are continually upgraded to provide smoother and cleaner power.

Using a modem in the middle of a very large electrical storm does increase the possibility of a power overload, but once again, the chance of a strike near your location is very small. A better way to destroy your PC in a thunderstorm is surprisingly obvious - simply ensure your PC is operating next to an open window and exposed to rain, hail, high winds and is in the damage path of medium to large pieces of wind borne debris. A branch or piece of corrugated iron impacting a monitor at a hundred kilometres an hour can have very satisfying results.

If this seems too lowbrow for the dedicated PC deconstructionist, you can increase your chances of PC destruction by simply performing vital system maintenance during a thunderstorm, where there is a higher than normal chance of blackout. BIOS updates, operating system installation, disk defragmentation, all these things should be done during wild weather.

However, at the end of the day, despite a thunderstorm's enormous destructive potential, better results can always be achieved through human interference.



and the heatsink, congratulations, thermal instability or even heat death is assured. On no account should you use thermal tape or paste to ensure a contiguous medium between the CPU and the heatsink. Forgetting to plug the fan into the power socket on the motherboard can also assist in accelerating heat death of the CPU.

4. Memory

Installation of RAM is becoming depressing simple as most modules are now 'keyed' with a small notch, so they can only be inserted in one direction. Brute force can sometimes help damage the RAM slots on the motherboard; alternatively, you could drop the modules into the guts of the PC, onto synthetic carpet, onto a bed covered with nylon sheets, or even into a sink full of mildly soapy water. Dropping a plugged-in toaster in afterwards may also provide interesting results, but will probably necessitate a call to your electricity supplier for a new house circuit breaker.

5. Hard Drives

These are great, because the average hard drive is an excitingly solid piece of machinery that belies the delicacy of the moving parts inside. Killjoy manufacturers such as Seagate now protect the circuitry of the drive by encasing the whole thing in a patented "seashield" technology (which looks excitingly like a fetishist's rubber podsuit), but this can be peeled off with the assistance of a

hobbyist's scalpel.

Before installation, make sure you drop the hard drive several times, preferably onto a hard surface such as slate or concrete. However, soft surfaces like the afore mentioned synthetic carpet should also suffice.

Installing a hard drive upside down will probably not have enough negative effect for the true enthusiast, but using screws that are too large to secure it to the PC chassis can occasionally have spectacular results. Also, securing an HDD by only one screw, allowing it considerable room to vibrate can also provide good results.

If the PC has multiple hard drives, you should also make sure they are installed as close to one another as possible and that ventilation and airflow around the drives is minimal. If the drives are 7500rpm models, so much the better. Packing any empty space with plastic bubble wrap for 'shock absorbance' can also have interesting consequences.

The above tips can also be applied to optical drives such as

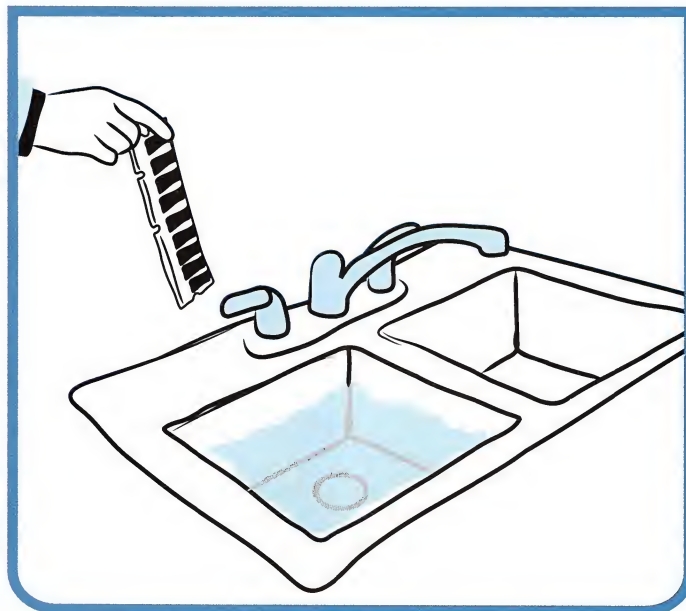
CD, DVD or CDRW drives, with similar results.

PCI and AGP cards

If you have a cheap and nasty case (and if PC destruction is your aim, you should) then odds are the slots on the back will not be perfectly perpendicular to the PCI and AGP slots on the motherboard. When installing relevant cards, you should focus on having the card line up with the slot and tightly screw it in with an electric screwdriver. If the card is properly seated in the motherboard there is a risk that it will work properly. It's a good idea to make sure the card has at least a few golden 'teeth' protruding slightly.

Handling the cards with sticky or dirty fingers also increases the opportunity for strange component-level malfunctions caused by conductive debris bridging important PCB tracks.

You should have as many PCI cards as possible installed in your machine. If there is an onboard motherboard equivalent for, say, Ethernet or six channel sound, it



Contracting viruses

Many readers have written in to PC PowerPlay complaining that despite their best efforts they seem unable to contract any viruses on their PC. They cite the usual precautions - making sure not to update anti-virus image files, not using anti-virus software at all, visiting wild and crazy corners of the Internet - yet they remain resolutely virus-free. Of course, like a biological virus, the key to contracting a PC virus is exposure. It's important to sign up to as many mailing lists as possible (see Collecting Spam) to maximise your chances of intercepting a viral vector. When you receive unsolicited email, look carefully for mail containing attachments, and particularly .scr or .exe

attachments. Opening these will almost guarantee infection by any of a hundred or so malicious bits of code.

It's also important to click on all the pop-up windows you encounter while web browsing. You can increase the frequency of pop-ups using the same methods as outlined in Collecting Spam, and be sure to pay particular attention to those pop-ups that claim to have fixes for your PC ready for download. Also anything to do with the rebirth of Napster. If none of this seems to work take heart - many viruses today are 'Trojans', designed to activate only on a certain date, so if you're very lucky, you're already heavily infected and need only wait for the big day.

BIOS for beginners

If you're really determined to destroy your PC and aren't afraid of getting your elbows a little greasy, attempting a BIOS Flash when you have no idea what the BIOS is (and you think you know what flashing is, but think it can't be that in this context) is one of the best ways.

Your motherboard initiates your PC's boot sequence using a set of instructions on a series of small chips called the BIOS. As new operating systems and components are released, the motherboard manufacturer periodically rewrites the BIOS. You simply download a new BIOS image from the Internet, and a BIOS Flash Utility to suit. Run this without examining the attached readme file carefully, and you're already halfway to PC destruction.

An effective way to ruin the BIOS is to flash with a completely inappropriate BIOS image, preferably for a motherboard of exotic and obscure manufacture. Unfortunately, this method can be unreliable as your motherboard may take no notice of the image or the flash utility won't even work. A better way is to get the right BIOS update, begin the flashing process and then arrange for your PC to lose power in some way, whether through an inopportune blackout (see Thunderstorms) or from actually yanking the freaking power cord out of the machine. Without a working BIOS your machine should not boot at all - this is by far one of the most dramatic and satisfying ways of destroying your PC.



install Windows, you haven't installed it properly.

Your PC at home

The tips above should provide a fairly comprehensive guide to the prospective PC builder who also wants to destroy their machine. But what to do if you already have a machine? Something pre-built by Packard Bell or HP? How can you best destroy a PC lovingly tested for reliability by dozens of barely-literate R&D monkeys? Here are a few tips.

1. Food

It's been said that a LAN plays on its stomach, and indeed food is an excellent source of potential PC destruction. It seems obvious, but practices as simple as eating flaky pastries hunched over the keyboard can slowly build up a poisonous residue that not only fouls keyboard pantographs, but can also attract cockroaches and other helpful insects, which can subsequently crawl into the PC case and be spectacularly electrocuted, hopefully taking out a vital component with them.

2. Drink

Plain water is no longer likely to do too much damage to a PC vis a vis a spillage, although leaving a PC in the rain for six or seven days can result in pleasing levels of corrosion. The best liquid to spill inside a PC is Coca-Cola. Its corrosive and poisonous qualities have long been documented - a bowl of Coke can dissolve a steak overnight, so imaging the effect a can could have if split across the motherboard.

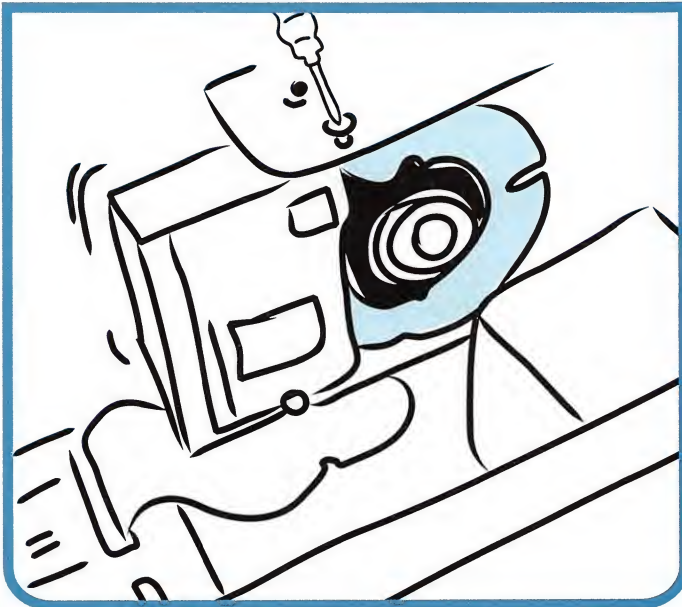
If a spill does occur, you should immediately run from the room and panic for at least fifteen minutes. Do not power down the PC. On your return, if the PC is still operating, immediately attempt to mop up the spill with a damp sponge. Alternatively, pick up the PC and try to shake the Coke out. If you can drop the PC during this procedure, so much the better.



3. Stairs and falls

Kick your PC down a flight of stairs for best results. The flight needs only to be six or seven stairs high. If the PC can somehow remain powered up during the fall, even better.

Falls of all kinds can have excellent results. Try balancing your PC tower on a stack of flimsy magazines (this mag does not apply as flimsy, obviously), DVDs, or even freshly laundered Eminem



should be disabled or, preferably, not disabled at all, allowing for some very interesting conflicts once the OS is installed.

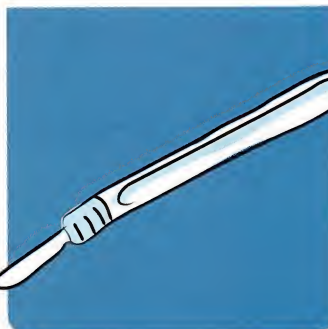
Operating System

Speaking of OS, the very best Operating System of all for PC destruction is Windows Me. This poorly conceived 'stop gap' release bridged an awkward 18 month gap between Win98 SE and Windows XP. It attempts to remove as much user

control as possible and clogs up much of the system with stupid restore functions that don't even work.

When installing Win Me you should go for as many automatic options as possible and randomly hit the reset or power switch several times during installation. Opening the CD drive while Windows is involved in one of its interminable file copying procedures is also good policy.

Remember that if you haven't taken eight hours and 112 resets to





Uninstalling

This method is a subtle, but important, step in destroying a PC and particularly effective for those people who want to go about it a little more artistically than simply hitting the thing with a large fire axe. Once upon a time, simply uninstalling a program would have very little negative effect on a PC, unless it was a vital system file from the Windows directory. Happily, with the advent of the Registry and other complicated OS dependencies, simply deleting a program's directory has the potential to leave dozens of isolated files scattered across your hard drive, ready to cause havoc, prevent reinstallation or update of other programs, or simply clog up disk space and impede performance. If you continually start and abort installations and then delete the half-full directories, you can slowly build up a nasty residue of useless files, ensure your HDD remains fragmented and slow, and in extreme cases cause hang ups, blue screens of death and unexpected reboots. And best of all determining which programs offer the best opportunities for this kind of situation is half the challenge!



T-shirts. If you can arrange for the PC to tip over six or seven times a week, slow but steady destruction is all but assured.

4. Installs

The rule is simple. If you get something on CD, via email or downloaded off the Net, install it immediately. Install everything you can lay your hands on. Leave it installed, especially if you could never make it work. In fact, if it doesn't work, install it again just to be sure. Install new versions without first uninstalling old versions. Get unofficial updates. Get lots and lots of mods for Quake 3 in Alpha 0.7 release. Get those things that are supposed to speed up your modem through witchcraft. Get Virtual Girl, who strips and lives on your desktop, the poor thing. Above all, get the Realplayer Jukebox. You'll love the way it slowly takes over your whole personal universe and system tray.

5. Children and Relatives

The final and most effective method in destroying your PC is to allow all and sundry to access it whenever they see fit. While your likewise computer literate friends will probably fail to do very much damage at all, unless you're lucky enough to have friends who are malicious, your family will probably have to take most responsibility in ensuring your PC bites the virtual dust.

Children are an obvious source of destructive power, from simple bashing of keyboards and gnawing of mouse cords to inadvertent deletion of vital system files, which even the mighty Windows XP itself would never have thought someone in their right mind would delete. Makes sure very young children are able to use your PC for at least a couple of hours a day for best results.

Older relatives and especially very old relatives can be marvellous source of PC destruction because you, your mate

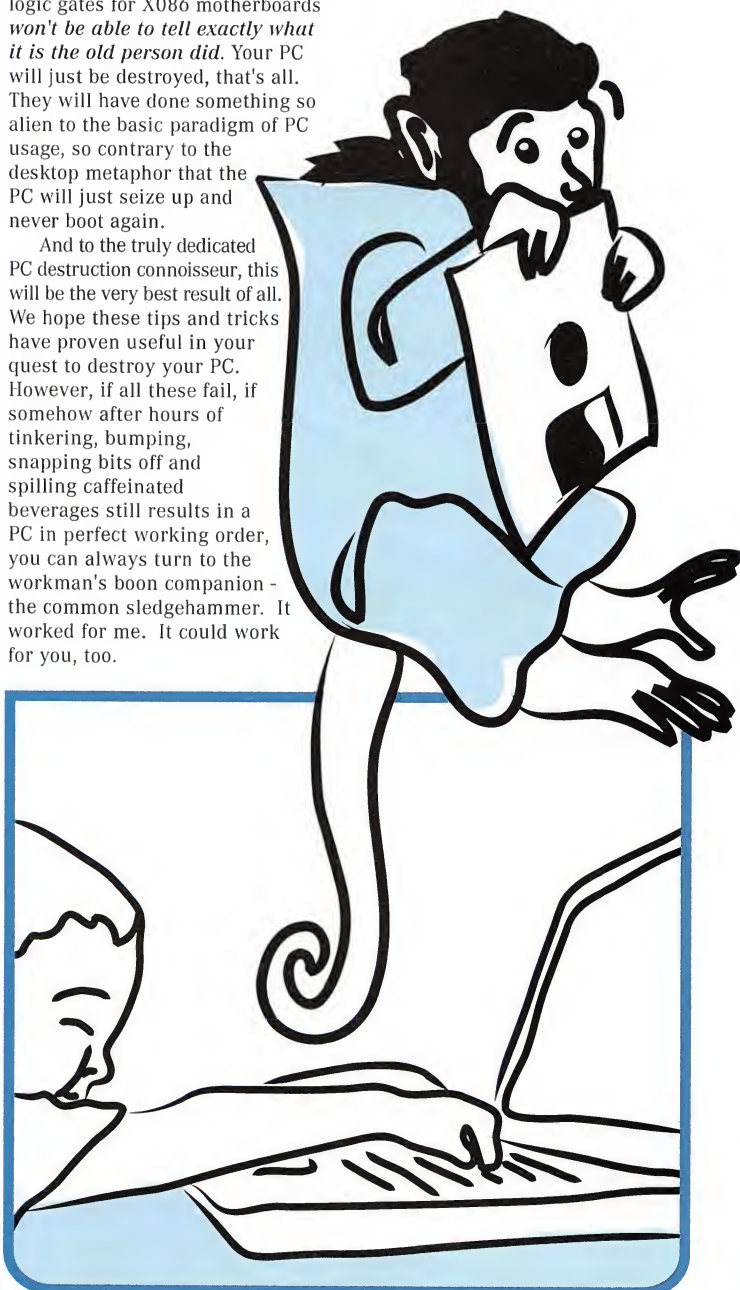
Collecting Spam

Are you sick with jealousy listening to your friends' boasting about the amount of Spam they get each day? Worried that you don't even know what Spam is? Spam is unsolicited email, usually advertising, that arrives in your mailbox sixteen or seventeen messages at a time. This can help to slow down your connection, make your PC a more obvious target for viruses and, of course, provide endless opportunities for embarrassingly awkward social situations as you're discovered reading about penis enlargement or worse, those tiny little remote controlled cars. The best way to guarantee a healthy Spam 'harvest' is to visit as many obscure pornography sites as you can find and sign up for all their newsletters. Some

porn sites don't even demand payment, they just ask you to click on a banner directing you to a non-porn site to sign up for its newsletter. This latter type of site is an ideal source of Spam, as not only will it mail you every second day, it will pass your details to other Spammers, so you can expect tens or even hundreds of emails in your inbox every time you log on! A Hotmail or Yahoo address is best for Spam as many ISPs can now block the more obvious Spam sources. You can also track Spam vectors by using a crazy made up name and address on your original Spam sign-up. Then when you get "Ronald Smithburger, dozens of property foreclosures in the Zoofroozlechester area!" you know exactly where they got your email address.

who works at IBM and even the guy your Dad knows who invented logic gates for X086 motherboards *won't be able to tell exactly what it is the old person did.* Your PC will just be destroyed, that's all. They will have done something so alien to the basic paradigm of PC usage, so contrary to the desktop metaphor that the PC will just seize up and never boot again.

And to the truly dedicated PC destruction connoisseur, this will be the very best result of all. We hope these tips and tricks have proven useful in your quest to destroy your PC. However, if all these fail, if somehow after hours of tinkering, bumping, snapping bits off and spilling caffeinated beverages still results in a PC in perfect working order, you can always turn to the workman's boon companion - the common sledgehammer. It worked for me. It could work for you, too.



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IN REVIEW

I'm writing this two days before I head off to Los Angeles to attend this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3). It's a strange time of year to be working on a games magazine. On the one hand, there's the huge sense of excitement that comes with having the opportunity to sample gaming's biggest and brightest hopes for the forthcoming year (and, in many cases, beyond). Listening to developers passionately enthuse about their newest project is always a thrill - grabbing a mouse and actually playing them is (usually) even more so. Witnessing a game in action for the very first time is inspiring, and with it you feel energised by a palpable sense of renewal spreading through the industry. Work-in-progress games are full of endless possibility. You're free to envisage incomplete levels and yet-to-be-added features as utterly perfect in every way. Ultimately, the game's going to be as great as you - fingers crossed - want it to be. Especially when the keen lead designer just can't stop telling you how cool it's going to be when it's finally done. However, you've got to temper such idealism; developers can more often than not talk a good game better than they can create them. And of course, such optimism is diminished later in the year as the flood of half-baked cash-in titles arrive in time for Christmas, luring hapless mums and dads with their flashy licensed credentials. Nevertheless, it is a genuine thrill to see the likes of DX: Invisible War, Half-Life 2, Rome: Total War,

Flashpoint 2, and Far Cry in action, to name but five, I anticipate will send those good old shivers up the spine in a few days' time.

Yet on the other hand, there's still all those games hitting shelves right now to worry about. While I've been daydreaming over the dozens of outstanding games I'll be tasting in LA, there's still sixteen pages of game reviews to fill in this very issue. It's hard to get excited by the right here, right now, when you've got the untainted perfection of the future staring you in the face. All the faults in this issue's games appear so unsightly in comparison with the flawless sheen of the games of 2004. That occasionally dodgy framerate in Enter the Matrix can't compete with the polished beauty of Half-Life 2's painstakingly captured

screenshots. Why even think about Vietcong when Flashpoint 2 seems so enticing? Why consider Viking Invasion (even if it's the highest scoring game this month) when you know Rome: Total War will leave it for dead?

In such a cutting-edge industry, who's got time for the present? Or maybe I'll be back here next month, recanting, dreams shattered, a broken man? No, surely Thief 3 can't let me down...

David Wildgoose
Editor,
davidw@next.com.au



PCPP TECH REVIEW SYSTEM

Here at PCPP we scour the land for the latest in PC technology, then ruthlessly test it in the decentralised hardware democracy that is the PCPP Tech Bunker. A hardware review is much more objective than a game review - there are quantifiable elements to most bits of good kit, and the benchmark, as always, reigns supreme. We take into account the performance of a product first, but price is also a factor. We provide reviews of hardware you can expect to afford, as well as the occasional item that's too cool not to review.

All our review products are compared against at least one leading brand to give a meaningful indication of performance and what you can expect should you actually buy the thing and put it in your precious machine.

Each product is rated out of 100, where a higher score indicates a better balance of price and performance. For items where the prices is low and performance is not relevant, such as modding accessories, a more subjective analysis of the product is undertaken, where we use our experience with such items to determine whether or not they'll help make your machine look cooler or just plain tacky.

Finally, those products that are 'must have' items receive the coveted PC PowerPlay Gold award. This award is reserved for hardware that is serious kit, indeed, and will improve your PC so it's well worth the investment.



GOLD AWARD	HIGH DISTINCTION	DISTINCTION	CREDIT	PASS	FAIL
The ultimate accolade. A game that receives a Gold Award is an essential purchase, and the only excuse for not owning it is either not having a powerful enough PC, or not having a PC at all. Or arms. It represents a new direction in gaming, a new benchmark against which all others will be measured. It defines its genre, or creates a new one. It is gaming. You must own it.	This is the finest in gaming. A fresh concept, a perfect execution, a meaningful extension to a tried and tested format, one or all of these are required for this score. We strongly recommend the purchase of each High Distinction game, but extremely fussy gamers may want to skip those HD games that don't also receive Gold Awards.	An intriguing new concept or a bold new direction that manages to pull its new trick off with a reasonable degree of flair. You will be impressed, at either the graphics, the gameplay or some other new element that you may not have encountered before. Or perhaps this is a familiar gaming concept, but one executed so well it's almost - but not quite - an essential purchase.	Solid, playable, largely bug-free, entertaining and maybe even a bit unexpected, these are the hallmarks of a game of Credit. You may have seen it all before, but you won't mind, because a Credit game does what it says on the box - it plays well and it keeps you hooked. An essential purchase? Not necessarily, but worth consideration.	A game that receives a pass is playable, but its concept may be flawed, its extras may be lacking or its graphical enhancements may have fallen off somewhere in a lengthy bug-fixing process. And bugs there may be, although in the end the game will, as we say, work. Purchase if you're curious, but discerning gamers will probably look for something more substantial.	There are more than 5000 games released each year. Some are gems. Some are merely unremarkable. Others are nothing more than a shameless grab for cash. Graphics will be rudimentary and gameplay will be worse. If you see someone considering a game that has failed, gently take them by the elbow and hurl them out of the shop. It's your duty as a good citizen.
90+	85-100	75-84	65-74	50-64	0-49

GAMES

78 Game of the Month

Medieval: Viking Invasion



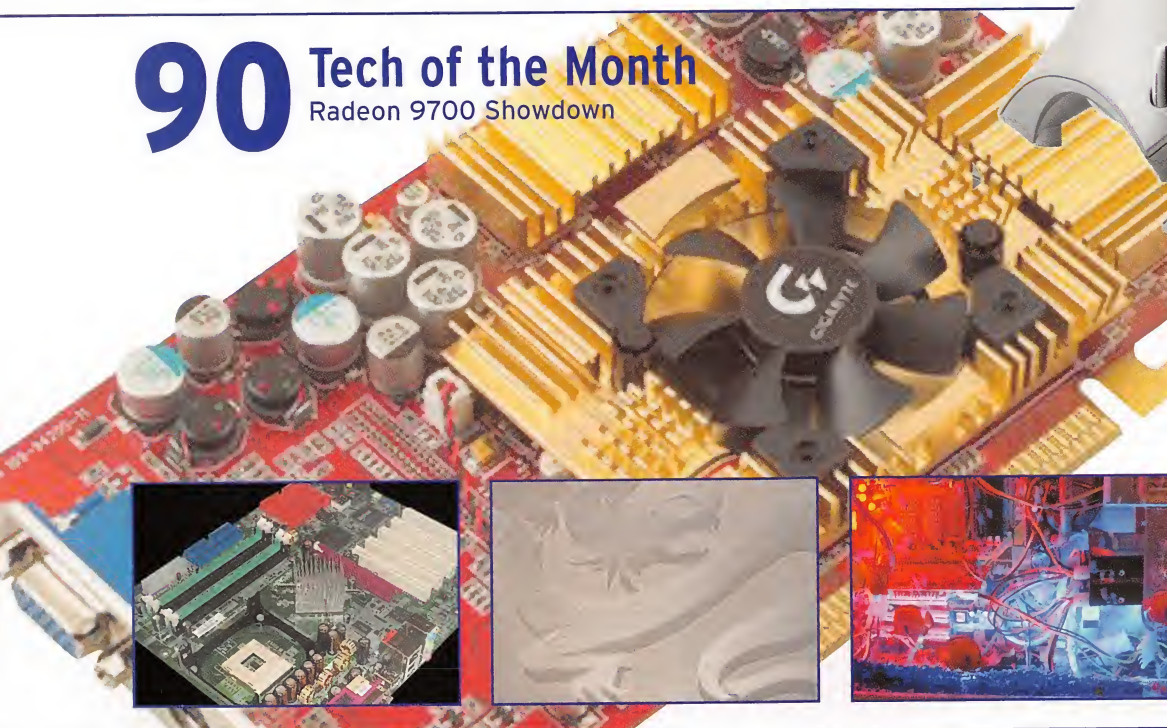
- 72 Enter the Matrix
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TECH

90 Tech of the Month

Radeon 9700 Showdown



- 88 Intel 1875P Motherboard
- 89 Abit GeForceFX 5800
- 90 Radeon 9700 Showdown
- 92 Athlon 2700+ PC
- nVidia GeForceFX 5600
- 94 2.1 Speaker Showdown
- 96 H2O-8500PV Water Cooler
- Fish Tank Side Panel
- Window Applique
- 97 Pre-Modded PC
- Case Showdown

Enter the Matrix

Daniel gets ready to dodge some bullets

Developer: Shiny Entertainment ■ Publisher: Atari Interactive ■ Distributor: Infogrames ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

SYSTEM

NEED

P3-800
128MB RAM
4X Speed CD-ROM
GeForce 2 / Radeon
8500 Videocard
4.3GB HDD

WANT

P3-1.2GHz
256MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

www.matrix.com
Hmmm, about hair of all things! Did you know you can upload your own head and try on all sorts of different styles? And in 3D? What a nightmare! Shampoo your locks, towel dry and then smear some grease on the ends and viola - instant wanker appeal!

A veil of secrecy surrounds Enter the Matrix - there are things we are not able to reveal, and for good reason. As you probably already know, Enter the Matrix features scenes from the movie as well as plot elements only game-players will discover. As such, we have been told in no uncertain terms that we can only reveal the very basics of the plot - Niobe, the nattily dressed and sexy captain of the fastest hovercraft in the Zion fleet, and her faithful 21C, the taciturn Ghost, recover information that could prove vital to the survival of the last Human city. It's up to the player to protect the future of the race and lay the royal smack down on the robots. Aside from the kung fu shenanigans and gunplay of the film, Enter the Matrix also features driving levels in which you can drive various cars and even pilot the hovercraft. Each character is given seven large missions with each cut down into multiple smaller sub missions, so you can expect around 25 hours of play, even on easy difficulty.

Am I The One?

The Matrix has influenced all forms of audio-visual entertainment including games. Since the release of the film in 1999, everything seems to contain bullet time or wire-fu. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. Strangely enough for a game based in the Matrix

universe, players will be seeing a fair share of bullet time, or "Focus" as it is known, during play. The effect is niftily handled and comes across as a more versatile Max Payne bullet time. Although combat is a fairly straightforward affair with punch and kick combos achieved by bashing the respective buttons whilst holding down different

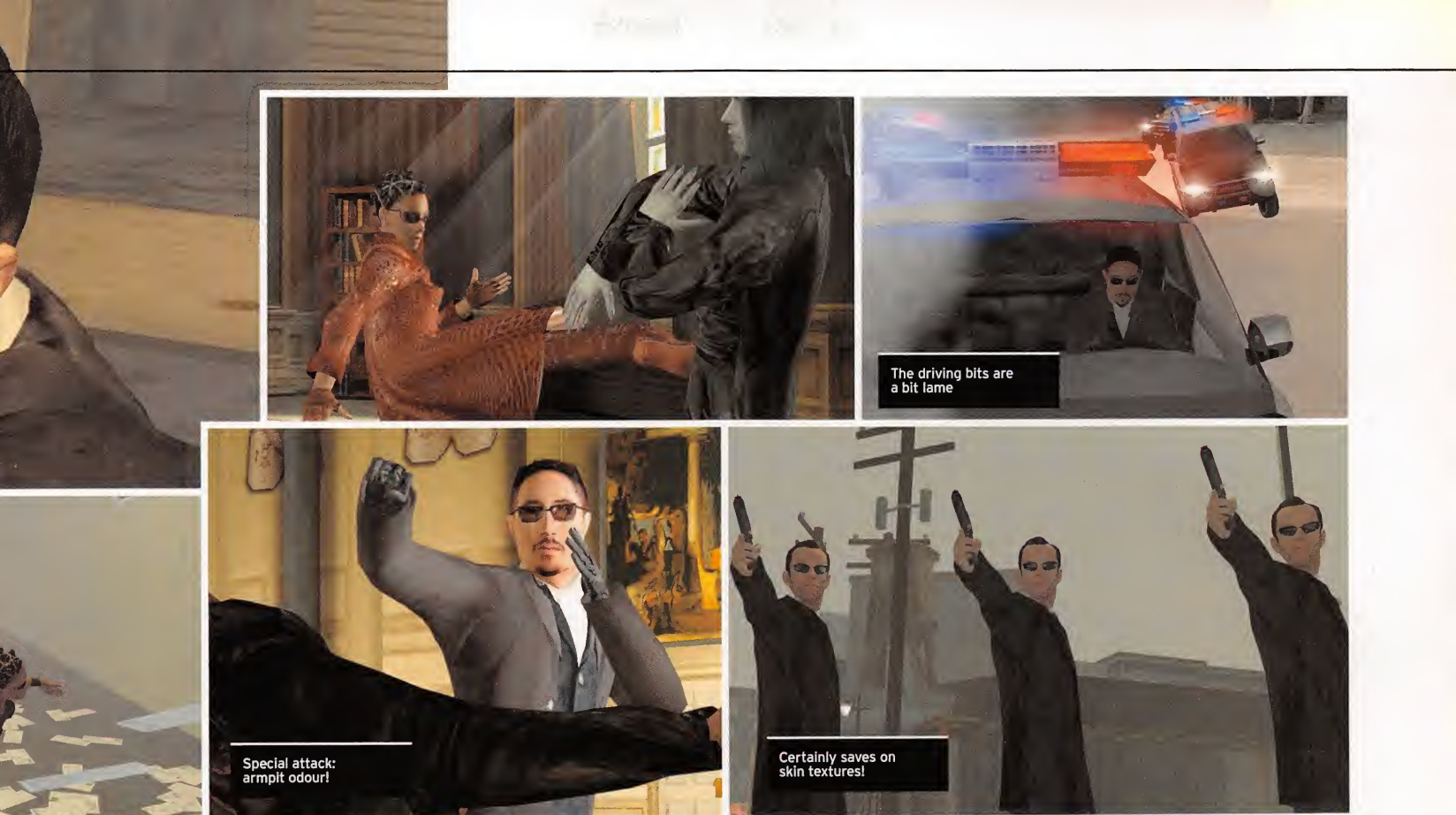
OMINOUS PORT-ENT

The only thing holding Enter the Matrix from being a truly fantastic game is the shoddy nature of the port. Little or nothing has been done to take advantage of the advanced PC hardware. The first problem you'll encounter with the port is the control setup - there simply aren't enough fingers on your keyboard hand to effectively fight. Whilst the controls work brilliantly on console, they aren't intuitive enough for PC. Occasional tips also pop up on how to perform a move - don't be surprised if you're told to use a key that has either been renamed for the PC port or doesn't exist at all. The final irritating point is the insistence on save points. The game saves when it wants to save - not when you want it to.

direction keys, the range of animations and location sensitive moves maintains your attention and prevents gameplay from going stale. Holding down the Focus button causes the player to enter bullet time. In this mode, you can see bullet trails that allow you to dodge them like a pro and make the spectacular wall runs, jumps and dives. It also increases the power (and cool value) of hand-to-hand attacks and shot accuracy. Completing certain mission objectives (such as beating an agent in one of the more interesting Niobe set pieces) rewards players with larger focus meters, allowing them to stay in their physics defying state for longer. Engaging enemies in hand-to-hand combat recharges focus faster than shooting enemies, so keep that in mind as well.

Although gunplay plays a major part in the game it's a little too arbitrary to be truly great. Targeting is very difficult (unless in first person mode), so there's a simple auto-target feature to compensate. Unfortunately, this means the player needs only to blaze away and the AI takes care of the rest. Whilst this is fun to begin with, it does become





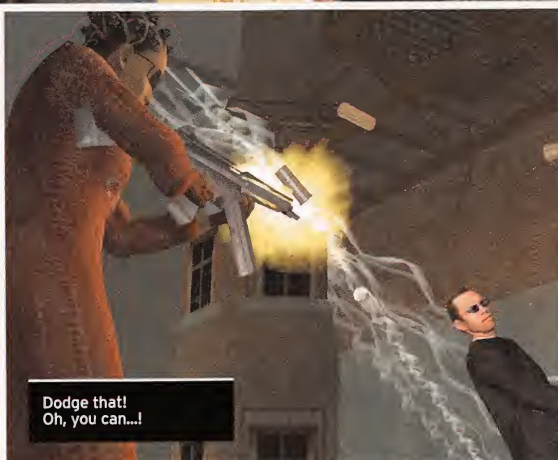
The driving bits are a bit lame

Special attack: armpit odour!

Certainly saves on skin textures!

THE REAL WORLD

The greatest strength of *The Matrix* as a fictional world is that Andy and Larry Wachowski have created a place in which anything can happen and the audience can appreciate it. The Brothers Wachowski decided they wanted to make a superhero film and set about creating an environment in which the powers would not seem out of place. This malleable nature of the world leads to one of the most interesting levels in the game in which Niobe must fight off vampires. Instead of shaking your head in disbelief, the very nature of the setting has you saying, "cool" and then set about putting wood to heart.



Dodge that! Oh, you can...!



tiresome half way through the game when you find yourself having to mow down hordes of generic mooks. Players can snipe in a first person mode and manually target, but this comes with it's own problems. When in first-person mode, the player cannot move, which is obviously a carryover from the console port where you'd be using the analogue stick to target instead of move. Combine this with the missing crouch or prone postures and suddenly you're a target for the enemy when you're trying to aim.

Maybe he's The One?

Although *Enter the Matrix* features two separate campaigns - one for each of the main characters - there is some early evidence of lazy game design.

Many of the missions show only a nominal bit of difference and remain, for all intents and purposes, identical. The first mission is an excellent example. As Ghost, the player must break into a Post Office after closing and recover

some emergency information dropped off by the crew of the *Osiris*. After charging in and beating up some rent-a-cops, host retrieves the information, only to find his escape route blocked by an explosion caused by Niobe's 'diversion'. Play through the first mission as Niobe and you'll take a slightly different route to the information (with all of the same action set pieces) only to discover an explosion caused by Ghost's 'distraction' has cut off your escape route. You'd think more work would be put into the first mission to differentiate both story lines. However, there are later missions that are wildly divergent from the homogeneity of the first missions. These truly show how two characters could interact to achieve a common goal. A case in point is when Ghost and Niobe storm an airport to rescue some rebels. Ghost's missions lead him up into the airport and eventually into the control tower to provide sniper support for the escape. Niobe, on the other hand, takes a more direct route through the airport and engages the enemy on the ground.

Oh, you're The One!

Enter the matrix looks great with high polygon characters and superb animations. Fight scenes are wonderfully dynamic creatures - the more fights you

get into the more moves you'll see. The various enemies you encounter show some fantastic personality (mostly shown through the way they fight) and, whilst the generic characters look just that, bosses and special characters, however, look great. The first time you meet Cain and Abel (the two albinos from *Reloaded*) and see them fight you'll know you're up against the wall. As good as the graphics look, the real standouts are the cutscenes made up from film footage and footage specially shot for the game. The game specific footage is of exactly the same production quality as that of the film, complete with state of the art special effects, big name actors and masterfully choreographed kung fu.

Daniel Wilks



RATING



FOR

Excellent kung fu
Amazing cutscenes
Great plot

AGAINST

Lazy port
Some lazy design
Dodgy controls

OVERALL

A first rate game let down by a second rate port.

85



Warrior Kings: Battles

Redefining the RTS genre for all you veteran gamers out there

Developer: Black Cactus ■ Publisher: Empire Interactive ■ Distributor: Red Ant ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

SYSTEM

NEED

733MHz CPU
16MB 3D Videocard
128MB RAM,
800MB HDD
DX 8.1

WANT

1.4GHz+ CPU
64MB GeForce 3
256MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

www.solarb.com/mead/mead.html
Want to get trolleyed druid style? Learn how to make mead with honey, water, cloves and even strawberries.

I have to make a confession: I enjoyed Age of Empires 2. A lot. The campaigns were good and skirmish games were cool at their time, especially with a few resources and instant build cheats thrown in. It was isometric 2D, but the graphics were fine in a Command & Conquer sort of way. Of course, it's been thoroughly superseded by 3D games such as Age of Mythology and, to stretch the genre, Warcraft 3. There were quite a number of repetitive and tedious aspects to playing AoE, and it looks like Black Cactus has set out to do something about that.

WKB is a 3D real time strategy game where you need to gather resources, build a city, create an army, balance your population and crush your opponents. Although there's nothing new in that description, this is a game that is going to appeal to a wide range of gamers. The lush graphics and sound, simplification of many burdensome activities, and the diversity of unit types all work together to provide many approaches to gameplay that will appeal to military or

fantasy players alike. As you play you'll recognise similarities to other games, but persevere – things will look different as you continue to play.

WKB is a stand-alone sequel to Warrior Kings, which was released about a year ago. WK was received fairly well, but WKB answers two of the main complaints had about the game: the AI has now been smartened up considerably, and developing the skirmish gameplay, so that it exists!

Pulling Warrior Kings: Battles out of the box gave me a good feeling. Not only did it have a CD and manual, it also had a Game Controls leaflet and an A2 double-sided poster with a Units and Buildings Guide on one side and the Tech Tree on the other. This suggests the developers care about their game, how fun it is to play it and how well it can be played. The only let-down is that one important manual to describe special powers and commands, exists only as PDF when it really ought to have been published.

The interactive and scripted tutorials are important, even for a veteran RTS gamer, as there a few new approaches to resource gathering. For example, wood and stone are the same resource ultimately, but have differing "density." You will definitely want to read the manual

UNIT FORMATIONS

Unit formations are important in WKB because it gives members a number of benefits, such as increased firepower and resistance to attack. The benefits of a particular formation varies, and you'll need to choose the right one at the right time. There are four formations, one of which is great for defence, but members can't move. The wedge and line are good for attack, but is slow to move. The column is good for moving, but doesn't share damage and isn't great for combat.

regarding resources and units, including demonic Abaddons, Arch Druids, Archangels with the Sword of God and many, many more.

Europe is your oyster

As the campaign commences, you are faced with a map of Orbis, which is reminiscent of Western Europe. There are 22 provinces to conquer, and you can attempt to conquer any province, so long as it adjoins one you'd already conquered. That means you might have several choices as to which province to conquer next. As you might expect, the

These are developers that care about the game - how fun it is and how well it can be played



Formation Marching
Troupes are the pits!



Did someone hear
something go "fling"?



They may look scary but
they're a bitch to steer



Another B&S Ball goes
down in history...



GAME MODES

In addition to the extensive campaign mode, there are skirmish and multiplayer on GameSpy, LAN or WAN. Skirmish has standard and Valhalla mode, which adds a new twist. Standard allows you to play a fairly standard game against up to seven AI generals, with configurable starting resource levels. Valhalla is for the warmonger, as there is no economy or peasantry. Starting with a set amount of cash, you design your army and then go to war. Holding flags gives extra points over time. Multiplayer has an extra game type named King Piece, where the aim is to destroy the building where the king is hiding.

technology available to you will advance as you conquer provinces, but this is where it starts to get a bit more interesting. Each province has one or more generals controlling it, and the more generals, the harder it will be to become acquire (and it really does get hard). However, there's a payoff and you will receive a bonus from every conquest. The bonuses include an increase in the total population (say, an extra 40 people), new branches of the tech tree, or an increase in starting resources. You keep the bonuses for the rest of the campaign, but unfortunately it's not as simple as it seems.

Unlike every other game in this genre, you don't start as a particular race; you are simply an occupant of Orbis. Initially, you have peasants, who collect and manage resources, and a few simple types of military units. Over time you will make choices about the types of buildings you choose to build, and the conquest of some provinces will open up certain branches of the tech tree. This will make it easier to build some types of structures, but it can also preclude you from building others. A simple example of this is in relation to religion; if you build a church you can later build cathedrals, but you can't build a maypole, which prevents you from building future pagan temples.

Technology and paths

There are four levels in the technology tree, starting with Manor, then Keep, Castle and Palace. Each of the core civilisation types starts with an unaligned Manor (the

headquarters) and then diverge into your chosen alignment, which will be Imperial, Renaissance or Pagan. There are also combinations of civilisations, such as Imperial Renaissance, which share some technologies. The manor is upgraded until it is a palace, and a player is defeated when his or her manor is destroyed.

Your alignment not only affect structures but it also influences the population. For example, if you are an Imperial with a cathedral you can create a bishop, but if you are a Pagan with a Temple of the Moon you can produce an arch druid. Bishops can perform Acts of God, whereas the Arch Druid can bring creatures forth out of wood, stone or gold.

Like many other games, you can carry out research based on the structures or units currently available. Research takes time and resources, but produces advances in technology ranging from steel-tipped arrows to bombards.

Creating structures is generally done by peasants who collect resources and also farm. Over time you will struggle to balance the number of peasants against the number

of fighting units, as you'll need to keep a certain number of peasants around while sending the others to do the fighting and dying. This actually gets harder as the number of units increases. I don't know the ceiling limit, but it's well in excess of 300.

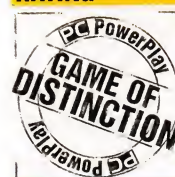
And in conclusion...

Warrior Kings adds a few fresh qualities to the RTS genre. It has new game types, good video and sound and added features such as walking trees and rocks. Also, repetitive tasks have been simplified through shift-clicking and a varied number of replayable campaigns has been introduced. Not needing to choose a race and having a wide variety of characters and weapons at your disposal is also refreshing. If you've got a GeForce 3 Ti 200 or better, then grab it.

Andrew Calvin



RATING



FOR

Replayability
New ideas
Formation movement
Mix of characters

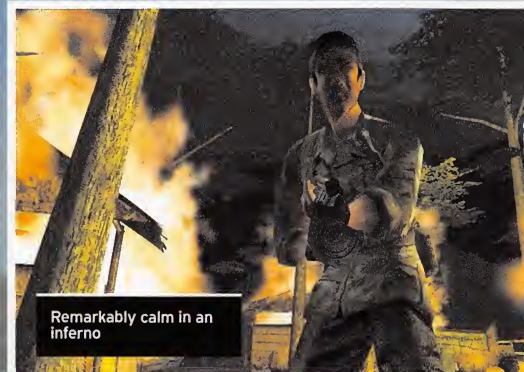
AGAINST

Heavy on the PC
Difficult campaign AI

OVERALL

Adds to the genre.
This one is good for
the eyes and ears.

84



Remarkably calm in an inferno



Hey, this doesn't look like the brochure!

Vietcong

Medal of Honor meets Ghost Recon for some jungle boogie

Developer: Pterodon ■ Publisher: Gathering ■ Distributor: Take2 ■ Price: \$79.95 ■ Rating: MA15+ ■ Available: Now

SYSTEM

NEED

P3-1GHz
256MB RAM
GeForce3
1GB HDD

WANT

P4-3.06GHz
512MB RAM
Radeon 9700
1.8GB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

lib.utexas.edu
It's the Lyndon B Johnson library and museum! SEE, HEAR AND FEEL the raw emotion of reading about one of the US's most loved and hated Presidents.



At last, a developer has hit upon the idea of creating a shooter based loosely on historical fact, not set in World War 2, that walks a line between the 'Doom plus' mindless gunplay of Medal of Honor and the hardcore simulation of Ghost Recon.

Vietcong is neither a simple run-and-gun FPS nor a realistic squad-based shooter. It requires tactics, thought, care and attention to detail. But it still leaves room for blazing gunfights. It provides a gaming experience that has not only been reheated, but also sprinkled with a new and exotic spice to make it seem newer than it really is. Unfortunately, it also runs like a dog. A lame dog.

History lesson

Anyone old enough to be legally allowed to buy this game (har har) should by now have heard of the Vietnam war. Fought controversially by the US, Australia and a few other allies in South-East Asia it involved the burning of millions of acres of virgin forest and farmland, the destruction of hundreds of villages, the bombing of Cambodia for no particular reason, the deaths of some 60,000 US soldiers and several hundred Australians and the likewise deaths of more than five million Vietnamese. It was fought ostensibly to prevent Communism from spreading

through the region in a 'domino effect', resulting inevitably in the People's Democratic Republic of Queensland.

You should also have learned that the US 'lost' the war in the sense that public pressure at home convinced the US government to pull out and leave the Vietnamese to the smoking ruins of their country. Robin Williams was also apparently involved in some fashion, but I forget how.

That should provide plenty of background for Czech developer Pterodon's first foray into mainstream gaming (their previous title Flying Heroes can be discounted as too whackily avant-garde), which takes place in the thick of the war in 1967. The player takes

the role of Sergeant First Class Steve Hawkins as he is transferred to a special forces unit operating out of Nui Pek camp right in the thick of Viet Cong territory.

As can be predicted, it is the player's role to take on a series of missions ranging from inoculating children to perforating everything in sight with high-calibre MG slugs. A selection of period firearms are available including the Thompson sub-machine gun, various familiar revolvers and also the Dragunov sniper rifle.

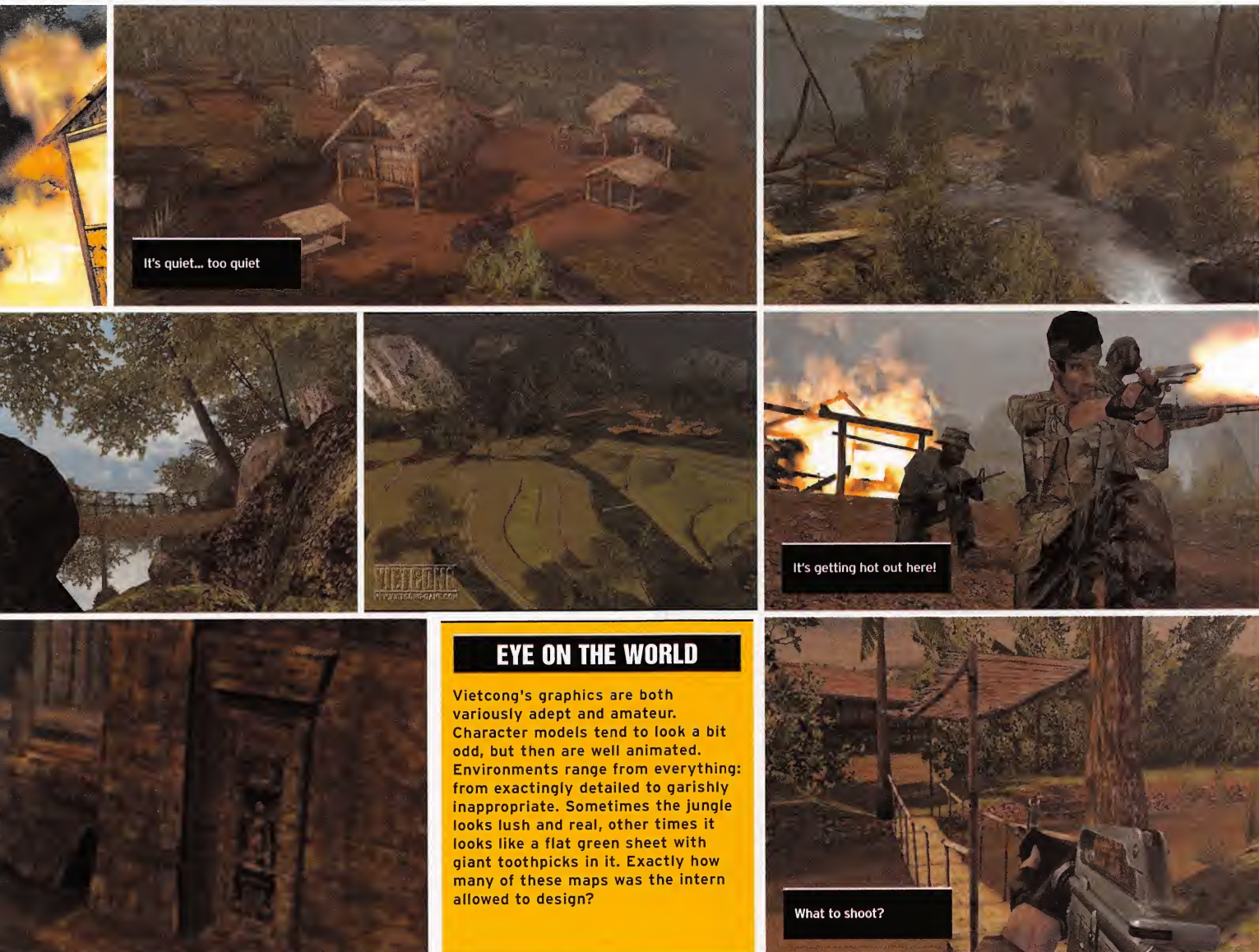
Spoils of war

Keen historians will of course recognise this last weapon as being Soviet in origin,



SHOOT ME QUICKLY!

Weapon handling is, uh, handled in a nifty way in Vietcong. Guns can be fired from the usual floaty chest-high position common to all FPSs, but hit the right mouse button and the weapon will be brought up to your eyeline for more accurate shots. Also, activating this sharpshooter mode makes Steve Hawkins automatically pop up from cover to take a quick shot - be careful though, as this can all too often result in a bullet clean between the eyes.



EYE ON THE WORLD

Vietcong's graphics are both variously adept and amateur. Character models tend to look a bit odd, but then are well animated. Environments range from everything: from exactly detailed to garishly inappropriate. Sometimes the jungle looks lush and real, other times it looks like a flat green sheet with giant toothpicks in it. Exactly how many of these maps was the intern allowed to design?

This is a game begging for a patch, however, with it's technical issues sorted, Vietcong could be a solid shooter

and the reason a US soldier is able to get his hands on one is because in the thick of battle, ammo is scarce, and it will almost always be necessary to equip with weapons left behind by dead or retreating enemies.

Vietcong does a decent job of

simulating at least some aspects of the Vietnam conflict. The first mission sees the player's entire squad of four heavily armed men pinned down by one guy wearing tattered shorts taking pot-shots from the other side of the valley.

Which brings me to the game's real selling point. Vietcong is not a run-and-gun shooter, it is not Wolfenstein with rice-paddies, instead it plays more like a light version of Ghost Recon. In fact, Sum of All Fears, the pop-sim from Ubi Soft that attempted to cash in on the Clancy meiered film of the same name, is probably most like Vietcong in concept, if far inferior in execution.

Tactical thought is vital, but not oppressively so, and cover is key to surviving even the very early missions. Stand up and attempt to blaze away, and Hawkins will be dead in seconds. It's not one-shot-one-kill, but it's close. Fortunately, medics are also close, on hand to patch up the good sergeant, although there is a penalty to his maximum health each time a medic is used - these are field dressings only.

SHOOT, DRIVE, FLY

Like almost every First Person Shooter since Half-Life, Vietcong's interface includes a USE key. Unlike many games however, the USE key is implemented with considerable effectiveness. From tossing a kitbag onto your bunk to firing rocket pods from Huey transport choppers, the USE key is, well, the key to the world of Vietcong. With this utilitarian little nodule it's possible to do anything from man machinegun outposts, drive jeeps, to setting explosives and even, as mentioned in the main text, you can rather cleverly inoculate children. And before you ask, no you can't also napalm them. Thank God.

Team player

Use of the whole team is vital - a quick and easy communications system allows the player to direct the various squad members around the battlefield, usually providing covering fire while flanking the enemy, although there are other tasks the pointman, radio operator and demolitions expert must undertake. But all commands are simple to use and the tactics aren't too in-depth - this is still a high-action shooter, just one with a bit more meat than the competition.

Multiplayer had great potential, but, sadly, the design of the game modes - variations on capture the flag and last man standing - means they usually degenerate into bloody free-for-alls, although that might just be the kind of players I encountered online.

If it all sounds like it's more than worth your \$90, be warned. Vietcong is a technical nightmare, with framerate its biggest problem. Even on machines running 2GHz+ CPUs and Radeon 9700 videocards, the game is choppy. This can seriously affect your combat effectiveness, although it is tolerable - just.

This is one game begging for a patch. With the technical issues sorted, Vietcong would become a solid shooter with a refreshing shot of tactical depth. Until then, though, only buy it if you feel you can handle the poor performance.

Anthony Fordham

RATING



FOR

Tactical elements
Weapon fire modes
Storytelling

AGAINST

Choppy framerate
Inconsistent visuals
Slipshod multiplayer

OVERALL

An ambitious attempt to create a new kind of FPS sadly shafted by technical issues

71



Medieval: Total War: Viking Invasion

An expansion pack requiring thought over gung-ho action

Developer: Creative Assembly ■ Publisher: Activision ■ Distributor: Activision ■ Price: \$49.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

SYSTEM

NEED

Medieval: Total War
P2-350
128MB RAM
1.4GB HDD

WANT

P3-1.2GHz
256MB RAM
64MB Direct3D
Video card

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

www.totalwar.com
The official website
is here and all it
desires in the whole
world is to assist
you (YES, YOU!) in
all your Total War
needs. Aaaaarrghh!



The Total War series kicked off to a great start a few years ago with the quite popular Shogun Total War game set in medieval Japan. This game established the strengths of combining turn-based strategic/administrative gameplay with real-time military gameplay. With the introduction of a couple of expansion packs for this series, it looked as though it would go very far indeed.

Next up to the plate was the Medieval: Total War game, which came out last year and took the scale of the battles and the conflict up a notch. Taking place in Europe, Medieval: Total War grabbed the best aspects of gameplay created in Shogun and pushed it to an epic level. Interestingly, this latest expansion pack, which has been designed for the Medieval: Total War game, actually moves in reverse and reduces the scale of the conflict. While some might initially think this is a bad idea, the truth is it really creates a compelling game requiring a greater sense of long-term strategic thinking and planning.

Hail Ragnar!

The Viking Invasion expansion pack setting predates the scenarios in Medieval: Total War and centres around the islands of Britain and Ireland, as well as the Viking provinces of Nordland (present-day

Norway) and Jutland (present-day Denmark). The game starts in the late 8th century, when England was a mere collection of tribal elements forged into tiny kingdoms. Your goal is to dominate England and unify it under a single ruler. Unlike Medieval: Total War, you can't 'win' the game with glorious achievements. You have to rule the isle of Britain with an iron fist (sometimes encased in a velvet glove). You can play one of eight factions: the Irish, Mercians, Northumbrians, Picts, Saxons, Scots, Vikings and Welsh.

Each faction has its own advantages and disadvantages. For example, the Picts are probably one of the poorest realms on the continent due its geographic location in the far north, which makes it exceedingly difficult to build basic things like stockades or raise troops. However, its isolation and comparative poverty make it a less worthwhile target for Viking raiders and other factions. Historically, this is quite an accurate reflection of how the Picts fared against many of its enemies, particularly the ancient Romans. The Northumbrians, by contrast, are rolling in dough and are quite developed, but this makes them an attractive raiding spot and they're also vulnerable to attack from many sides. The Vikings, for instance, start out with better troop types and boats,

I WANT A BOW, DAMN IT!

Having played through this scenario as a couple of different factions, I was happy to see there were very culturally specific troop types for each group. However, imagine my annoyance when I played as the Irish and it looked as though I was unable to create archers of any sort. A lot of the other factions, including the plucky Picts, are able to raise archers, but the Irish didn't seem capable. Unlike Medieval: Total War, the troop types you can raise are not dependent on the area you're in, but are dependent on who you are. So, while I was able to raise legions of dart and javelin throwing troops, I wasn't able to raise a single archer troop. Considering how important bows were in warfare for well over a millennium in Europe, I found this to be inaccurate and troublesome.

which allow them to break away from coastal waters and cross the open sea. However, they don't have a initial base for operations in Britain and have to find somewhere to build their kingdom and ways to adequately defend itself.



Getting back to basics

The standard Medieval: Total War game allows you to create massive fortifications, citadels, etc, yet in the Viking Invasion pack things are a lot more basic. The best fortification you're able to develop throughout the entire game is a keep with a curtain wall, which compared with what you can build in the standard game, is really small potatoes. While this may seem to be an hindrance, it does require you to think more strategically of your attack on England. You have to be more cautious about leaving areas of your realm undefended and if a province is overrun, then you have only a limited amount of time to rescue any of your troops that are besieged in your fortifications. This adds an extra element to the game, which necessitates very long-term thinking.

Resources take a long time to develop. If you want to raise troops of any type of quality, you have to spend the money and effort to be able to raise them yourself. Even peasant troops, the basic unit of most armies, require you to build a couple of basic structures first before you're able to raise them. Laying the foundations for raising better quality troops, such as archers and spearman, take even longer to develop.

The most striking thing about how this long-term strategy works is in agriculture. In many undeveloped kingdoms, there's no form of large-scale agriculture and, as a

result, to gain anything from the land, you have to clear land first (a 16-year, 1,500 florin process) and then you have to create basic farms after that (another 16-year, 1,500 florin process). Only after this can you improve your agricultural output to levels in the standard Medieval: Total War game, but, even then, it's only up to 40 percent. During this, you can't build

SAIL THE SEVEN SEAS

Probably one of the most crucial aspects of the Viking Invasion expansion pack is the role of ships and how they can help you dominate the game. If you're able to build numerous ships and place them in the seas around England, then you have a very good chance of winning the game. Not only do the boats provide you with a means of transporting your troops to any province connected with the seas you control, but they also provide you with important intelligence about the movement of enemy troops in those provinces. Simply put, because most of the provinces in the game are connected to the sea, if you control the seas, you control the game. Sadly, not all factions are capable of building vessels capable of crossing the open sea, and so you can't go over and attack the Vikings on their home turf.

anything else in those provinces and it can restrict your ability to raise troops or defend your subjects. However, a reasonable agricultural base is essential for maintaining your kingdom, as your people still need to eat.

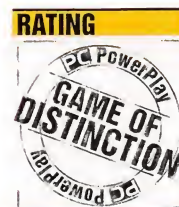
For kingdoms with little development, war becomes a fluid thing in which you let your enemies gain ground so that you can concentrate your forces and retake your own province in the next year. Because it takes a while to actually build up some fortifications, you can't have your troops run back and defend from a central point. If your troops are vastly outnumbered, then it's time to get the hell out and prevent your armies from being annihilated.

This returning to basics may seem a little over the top, but it actually provides for some compelling gameplay and provides the opportunity to appreciate the nuances involved with strategy, regardless of how the connection may seem to be at the time. For example, building infrastructure, such as fortifications and improving agriculture, is not only beneficial to your ability to fight, but it also results in masses of loyalty from your subjects, which can be a handy thing if your provinces get invaded. If you've been good to your subjects for many years, but the province is unfortunate to be invaded by an enemy, then your subjects will rebel against the attack in your name. However, these rebellions are often quickly quashed because they lack proper leadership, but it does mean your enemy's attention has been diverted whilst you attempt to regroup.

One area of revenue raising is religion. The construction of churches helps to keep your population happy and pious, while the building of abbeys and cathedrals can help provide money for the kingdom's coffers. You can, if you're taking the Viking route, choose to loot and pillage your way across the British Isles to bolster your treasury. Interestingly, the Vikings are pagan and have a whole other set of religious buildings and shrines that they can create to improve their subject's happiness.

Truth be told, I loved this expansion pack and I think it's one of those rare add-ons to really open up new aspects of the game, more so than Mongol Invasion, which was the first expansion pack for Shogun Total War. While the basic real-time military side of the game has not significantly changed, the strategic aspects of this back-to-basics environment really lift this from being just a simple add-on to being a very worthwhile expansion. For history buffs or people who are interested in learning a little bit more about the history of England, this a worthwhile addition to the already excellent Medieval: Total War game.

Phil Lucas



FOR

Strategic gameplay
Comprehensive
Balanced factions

AGAINST

Faction specific
troop types
No real-time change

OVERALL

It reinvigorates the
Medieval: Total War
game by taking things
back to basics.

75



Port Royale

Daniel shakes his pirate booty

Developer: MBA Studios ■ Publisher: Ascaron ■ Distributor: Red Ant ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now

SYSTEM

NEED

P2-450
64MB RAM
16MB 3D Videocard
500MB HDD

WANT

P3-900
128MB RAM
32MB 3D Videocard
500MB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

www.geocities.com/TelevisionCity/Set7055/pw.htm

Go for a trip down memory lane and visit Captain Pugwash and his crew of inappropriately named seaman, like Master Bates...

I'm sure there isn't a child in the world who hasn't tied a bandanna around their head and screamed "YARR, me hearties!" There's a certain mystique about pirates, a romanticism that's hard to shake off. Never mind the majority of pirates were filthy, morally reprehensible individuals who couldn't swing on a rope or swash a buckler (swashbuckling refers to the practice of rubbing a weapon against a shield to create a disturbing wall of sound meant to intimidate enemies) out of a cabin hold, but we still loved them and devoured anything featuring our favourite peg-legged villains - with the exception of Cutthroat Island, the much maligned Renny Harlin film. The big screen will soon be graced by yet another pirate film, *Pirate of the Caribbean*, which has the dubious honour of the first film to be based on a theme park ride.

What's all this about then?

Rather than simply strapping on a cutlass and heading out to sea, *Port Royale* gives players a chance to build their own business empire in real historical Caribbean settings. Players can choose to play one of four different nationalities, the English, French, Dutch and Spanish and can follow a number of career paths. Instead of initially locking players into a life of crime, *Port Royale* gives players the chance to live an honourable life

as a trader and merchant, or a slightly less honourable, but much more action packed, life as a hired gun/bounty hunter for the various nationalities or they can choose to become one of the hook-handed vermin of the sea. No matter which career path you choose the objective of the game is the same: to gather as much prestige, money and fame as you can. Players can go about gathering these commodities in a number of ways, ranging from the obvious, such as stealing shipments from other traders, setting up stable trade routes between colonies or tracking down and killing pirates. Or to the more in-depth modes of building housing

and industry in settlements (when your prestige is high enough), delivering food to starving colonies or planting crops to provide a long term source of food and income.

How the game plays

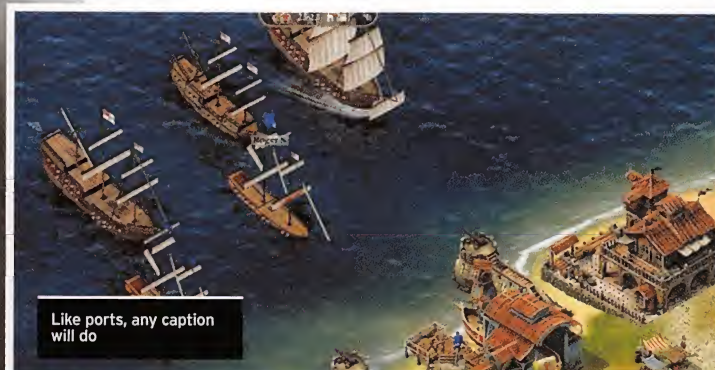
Single player mode presents players with a huge amount of missions as well as an enormous world to explore for treasure and good trade. The map encompasses an area around 3000 square kilometres, so you won't quickly run out of things to do. Thankfully, the developer has included a handy fast forward mode, so you are able to hurry through arduous tasks such as lengthy sea voyages or building housing.

Players begin in their home port (friendly to their nationality) with a few small ships and a wide range of possibilities. After a few missions, players should have enough money to build up their fleet and begin their infrastructure. After a few more missions and being promoted to the rank of Sailor, players are given a special map to find their secret hideout. The hideout features a castle, goods to trade and an area that can be built up into a town. The look of the castle changes with the decisions the player makes and the ranks they attain, so you can expect to see some fancy architecture.

Although *Port Royale* may initially sound like a tycoon style game, stick with it as the

LIFE IN PORT

When you're not sailing the seven seas in search of fame and fortune there are a number of distractions available in your home port. Aside from simply buying and repairing ships or trading goods, players can get involved in a high stakes game of dice, woo the Governor's daughter, pray at the church to bless your next convoy and raise the morale of the troops, talk to just about anyone to receive new missions, send ships out to plunder and search out rumours of buried treasure.



GAME MODES

In addition to the extensive campaign mode, there are skirmish and multiplayer on GameSpy, LAN or WAN. Skirmish has standard and Valhalla mode, which adds a new twist. Standard allows you to play a fairly standard game against up to seven AI generals, with configurable starting resource levels. Valhalla is for the warmonger, as there is no economy or peasantry. Starting with a set amount of cash, you design your army and then go to war. Holding flags gives extra points over time. Multiplayer has an extra game type named King Piece, where the aim is to destroy the building where the king is hiding.



gameplay is a lot more dynamic and players are given the option to let the AI take care of all of the micro-management or resources. Whilst it's not as economical as being self-sufficient, relying on the AI does give the player the chance to focus on the bigger picture. Unfortunately, there's no way to automate setting up trade routes, so you have to work through the entire process yourself, which at times can be painfully frustrating.

As could be expected from a game with pirates, Port Royale features sea battles as one of the major gameplay elements. Though players begin with only a small ship they can quickly build up a pretty large flotilla. As seems logical, the bigger and better the ship, the more cannons it can carry and the better it can protect your convoy or carry goods. Whilst players may only start with a tiny Pinnace holding a measly eight cannons, after a couple of hours play they should be able to afford a mighty Galleon, armed with a massive 44 cannons. The ten ships available to buy and build are closely related to its own historical counterpart, so you won't have to worry about combat with ships that can turn on a dime or travel at impossible speeds. Unfortunately, this also means that sea

travel is a long, slow process, even at the fastest pace. Similar to resource management, players are given the choice to let the AI handle combat if they don't want to do it themselves.

This variety of career paths gives Port Royale a high replayable value but, at the same time, it is also the albatross around its neck. Even though the player is given a large range of things to do, each element of the game seems unformed, as though the developers had finished the game in haste in order to get to the next idea. Initially, players will be overwhelmed by the amount of choice available to them, but it soon becomes apparent most options are little more than window dressing. It's all well and good allowing players to help build the infrastructure of the various ports, but they're given little choice as to building type making it a rather dull and repetitive experience.

Being pirates together

For those of you who fancy being able to plunder the loot from your mates, Port Royale comes with full multiplayer capability for up to eight players over LAN

or Internet. Multiplayer plays much like the single player game with everyone choosing their nationality and fighting it out for prestige and wealth. Although the idea of multiplayer pirates sounds very appealing the final product leaves a lot to be desired. As in the single player game, multiplayer contains a lot of sea voyaging. Unlike single player, however, there is no way to speed up time so it can take one hell of a long time for your fleet to reach their destination. The slowness of multiplayer could be forgiven if the game was truly engrossing but unfortunately the lack of focus for the game comes into play once again - players have a lot of choices but relatively little to do. A final nail is driven into the multiplayer coffin by the incredibly buggy net code. If you are lucky enough to be able to join a game you shouldn't be surprised if the game crashes within a few minutes. With any luck a patch will fix the problem.

For the most part, Port Royale is not a pretty game. The isometric graphics look low res even at the highest detail settings and the animations are dull for the most part. During sea battles the graphics are stunning. Although the ships look a little rough, this is offset by a decent level of detail, such as crew members scurrying around the decks and cannon balls lofting through the sky. Sound is fairly dull, but the soundtrack does contain a few rousing themes that should get your salty heart pumping.

As could be expected from a game with pirates, Port Royale features sea battles as one of the major gameplay elements

RATING

FOR

Pirates!
Sea Battles
AI micro-management

AGAINST

Little depth
Repetitive
Rushed

OVERALL

Not quite a buried treasure, but still an enjoyable, if somewhat rushed, sim.

70

Daniel Wilks



Devastation

The gap between the A-grade and the B-grade becomes a little more defined

Developer: Digitalo Studios ■ Publisher: Arush Entertainment and Groove Media ■ Distributor: Manacomm ■ Price: TBA ■ Rating: MA15+ ■ Available: Now

SYSTEM

NEED

P3-700
256MB RAM
32MB Videocard
1GB HDD

WANT

P3-1GHz+
64MB Videocard

MULTIPLAYER

No

ONLINE

www.devastationgame.com
This is the hub for all Devastation gamers and the home of essential patch updates. There is also a demo and a forum.



When it comes to game monikers, Devastation has left itself open to the mercy of reviewers for a possible pan. If the game failed due to erring on the developer's side, reviewers would throw the puns about declaring such an apt title for such a disappointing game. Thankfully, for the developers, Devastation is far from a wasteland lacking in life, although opening the packaging isn't like swinging wide the holy gates of Babylon either.

Digitalo Studios and Arush Entertainment have crafted a FPS more like decorated landfill. Sure, the soil tastes a little odd, the vegetable garden got up one night and walked away and you only get reception when the microwave is off, but hey, you can still play soccer on it. A game of diverting entertainment and inventive gameplay that aims high, but hits low.

Like a good Christopher Lambert movie, Devastation is B-grade gold. The plot is silly and poorly orchestrated, the action staged, the hero too-cool-for-school and the AI (see bad guys) simply cannon fodder. However, if you leave your critical eye unfocused, there is still plenty to play for. This is because the action comes thick and fast, accompanied by thumping sound and effective weapons in well-detailed and interactive levels. Unfortunately, Devastation suffers in its implementation, with solid ideas simply

beyond Digitalo's current capabilities.

When Bill Gates gets Mad

The concept of Devastation refers to Earth in the year 2075, where technology is no longer a mainstay of general living, but is horded by powerful and corrupt Mega-Corporations that use heavily armed platoons known as Pacification Squads to keep the good citizens under control. These are dark days indeed, but fighters known as the Resistance are starting to stand their ground. One such arm of this defiance is lead by Flynn Haskell, you, who forms a team of like-minded individuals to fight for the freedom of the world. Ok, it may rip off countless plots from the dusty lower-shelf videos in your local blockbuster, but it is still harmless and engaging fun. From the outset, the B-grade roots of this title are thrust into the limelight as a cut-scene, complete with cheap dialogue and blatant pop-culture worship, sets the scene. At this point, Devastation becomes nothing more than light entertainment, as there is no attempt to emotionally connect you to the plight of the human race.

Like most FPSs, the story unfolds as you progress your way through enemy-filled levels picking up health packs and weaponry while completing plot-

NO NEED TO PLAY WITH YOURSELF

At times, it can be said that the multiplayer capabilities of a game can have a greater effect on its market viability than the one-player option on which it is based. Gamers are a loyal bunch and prying their valued online hours from the holy trinity of CounterStrike, Unreal and Battlefield 1942 is no mean feat. Golden gameplay is the key and in a constantly varying gaming environment, there is no need to change titles unless the successor is a superior experience. Devastation is not superior. Offering your typical DM, Team DM and CTF options, the levels are well designed and the action fast paced, but despite having no serious flaws, it is simply outdone by the big guns.

developing objectives. Unfortunately, lapses in the gameplay and simple bugs seriously affect the challenge, which in turn affects the atmosphere. The main blame for this lay with the teammates you gradually pick up along the way, as they storm through the stages seemingly unharmed. They seem to chew lead like a horse chews grass and at times, the hail of



GUNS AND AMMO

Where would an FPS be without its arsenal and Devastation packs quite a punch. All your favourites are here and their stopping power is markedly different on the unfortunate victims. However, they are let down by annoying accuracy physics, which are too random, don't improve when crouching and don't exist when moving. Luckily, when it comes to mowing down countless squads of the enemy all is in good order and combined with some excellent SFX, will have you muttering the immortal Ramboism, 'You want a war? I'll give you a war you cannot believe'. Luckily, all action sequences come with some great drum'n'bass danger music, so at least the Cable Guy will enjoy himself.



bullets they unflinchingly let pound into their pixels makes the Terminator look like a pansy. This is a major flaw in the game's development as your teammates will react to your commands and can effectively let them take out the enemy for you. This isn't helped by the AI, which can often see these numb-nuts blocking your path or impeding your vision.

The problem of the AI extends to the enemy. They do little to avoid your fire and will often charge at you under a hail of bullets. This AS (Artificial Stupidity) wouldn't be as irritating if Digitalo didn't provide a Simulation option different to Arcade. The changes are meaningless with stealth elements like distracting soldiers by throwing cans negated by the AS. Still, taking the arcade route is always an entertaining option and there are great thrills to be had in watching blood splatter on the wall as your Uzi slowly eats away at a running target. This does, however, highlight Devastation's greatest problem. Its ambitious and innovative foray into the FPS market is hampered by the developer's inability to implement their goals to total success.

At least it's not Annihilation

The levels are well designed, but suffer from objectives that cause you to occasionally backtrack. They definitely conform to the 'look but don't go' philosophy where you can see many doors and interesting areas to explore, but

there's no way in there. Make no mistake, this is linear gaming all the way and a locked door, fallen piece of rubble or pain induced repellent (fire, gas, etc.) will make sure you never take a day trip down the wrong corridor. There are also some staged action sequences (e.g. elevators falling and ground artillery) that are too predictable.

This sounds a lot worse than it is, as the levels are excellently cluttered and interactive, with showers, fire hydrants, computers, microscopes and telephones all responding to your curious nature. They all work on independent physics allowing you, in theory, to kick, shoot and pickup specific objects, however, the implementation is clumsy. It is depressing to note that in the future they still have parking meters and broken vending machines. Overall, the varying levels (medical labs, rooftops, sewers, Chinatown) are engaging, interactive and very pretty to look at.

The SFX may be excellent, but graphically, Devastation is

a mixed affair. At times, the lighting, detail and mood combine to really make corporation repression and Rambo styled killing heroics a beautiful affair, but corners have been cut and, occasionally, hidden visual gremlins creep out on close inspection. Sold as the next-generation Unreal engine, Devastation at times can simply look like a tweaked Half-life engine. But this will generally delight players. However, the same cannot be said for the animations, which come from the land of Lego, and eventually, the blockiness and lack of curves grates the aesthetic senses. This is not aided by poor death simulations that result in bodies and blood to disappear almost instantaneously. The controls don't suffer from the same fate and safely follow the trajectory of all FPS. It is easy to navigate for regular gamers, although the throwing mechanisms and aiming deserved more developmental time.

Devastation is an ambitious title that strives to be a big FPS entity, but unfortunately doesn't cut the mustard. It provides stoic entertainment, but little challenge and suffers from a poor execution of excellent ideas. Happlessly, for all of Devastation's satisfactory performance as an FPS, it does expose the yawning void between itself and the big gun titles, such as Half-Life that on a galactic scale of game development, what we are seeing is years in the past.

Chris Stead

RATING

PC PowerPlay
GAME OF CREDIT
PC PowerPlay

FOR

- Some cool ideas
- High level interactivity
- Blood and guts

AGAINST

- Poor implementation
- Daft AI
- Gameplay flaws

OVERALL

A solid entertaining title that fails to capture the potential of its ideas.

71



Colin McRae Rally 3

Once more unto the breach my friends, once more...

Developer: Codemasters ■ Publisher: Codemasters ■ Distributor: Game Nation ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now

SYSTEM

NEED

P3-667
128MB RAM
GeForce3
1GB HDD

WANT

P4-2GHz+
512MB RAM
GeForce4 Ti4200
1GB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

colinmcrac.com
Yes! It's the official site which does absolutely nothing except count down to a rally that already happened! Plus there's a picture of Colin!

RATING



OVERALL

Definitely getting long in the tooth. Perhaps we should put him out of his misery?

70

Game number three in a series is always a tricky prospect. Sure, if game one was a massive hit a sequel is justified. But even if the sequel was successful, does the world really need another version of the same game with better graphics?

Many 'three' games get around this problem by adding chunks and chunks of new gameplay concepts, or making an already anally realistic simulation even more anally realistic with volumetric BO coming out of your co-driver's armpits. But CMR3 is not one of these games.

Tubular worlds

The first thing that will strike you as you load up your first stage is that CMR3 does not use a particularly modern terrain engine. Back in the late 90s and at the turn of the

century, rally stages were basically narrow canyons with a texture of impenetrable trees painted on each wall. A few trackside objects - usually flat sprites - were added here and there to give the game a bit of visual depth.

Dice's Rallisport Challenge changed all that, using a much more detailed terrain engine that allowed the player to actually see the track up ahead from crests. Trees were three dimensional objects and stages were liberally strewn with boulders, bridges, stone guard rails, rally-type pavilions and animated spectators.

Colin McRae Rally 3 is not like this. It harks back to the good old days of narrow tubular tracks with painted-on trees. It's a bit of a visual let down. But fear not, I hear you cry, surely CMR3's impeccable simulation will make up for lacklustre graphics?

Sadly, the driving physics are oddly simplistic, and cars seem to have a central pivot axis rather than an axis for each wheel and three for the body. On smoother tracks this means the cars do appear to go around corners oddly, and it becomes difficult to maintain a powerslide, one of the main techniques of rally driving.

Skinny and dumb

The structure of the game has been pared back again. The original CMR was a boisterous boofy riot of a game, with a crazy rally school model and funky interface with lots of chrome and tyres and whatnot. CMR2 went for a lean cyan interface with enigmatic symbols and the tightest navigation system ever. CMR3 takes ANOTHER step

toward absolute minimalism to the extent that it now looks stupid.

The clunky ugly menus stretch all the way across the screen, even for Yes/No options, so the words are repeated infinitely - YESNOYESNOYESNOYESNO. You'll quickly discover there's no school or arcade mode, just stages and championship. Stages are straightforward - select a car, race, select another stage. But championship is oddly limited.

It's only possible to drive Colin's Ford Focus, not any other car. This in itself is odd because Colin now drives for Citroen, so it's not even accurate to WRC teams. Multiplayer options are also disappointing - it's not possible to run a whole rally in multiplayer, which seems odd for a rally game.

Yes, CMR as a series is probably past it. Unless the developer embraces new terrain technologies and goes for all-out ultra-simulation, I'm advocating Colin be put out to pasture and shot.

Anthony Fordham





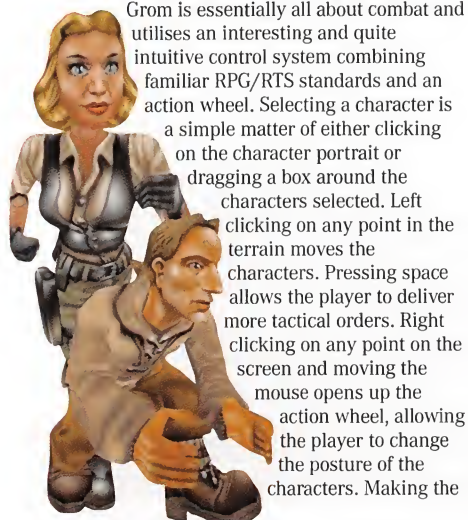
Grom: Terror in Tibet

Indiana Jones meets Hogan's Heroes - Unfortunately they don't get on

Developer: Rebelmind ■ Publisher: CDV ■ Distributor: Red Ant ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

To combine the swashbuckling Nazi-killing antics of Indiana Jones with monsters inspired by Tibetan mythology, the result should be akin to giving a ninja two nine millimetre pistols - making something cool even cooler. Unfortunately, Grom is more like giving said ninja a sword made from tinfoil and making him wear one of those headbands with the silhouettes of two guys fighting, which were very popular in 80's, and turning what is a great concept into a bit of an embarrassment. The titular character, Grom, is a grizzled war veteran, now living in the Far East, plying his skills as a mercenary and willing to take any job for money. After seeing a Nazi zeppelin high in the mountains, Grom becomes involved in a plot to find an ancient and powerful artefact that could turn the tide of the war. Throughout the course of the game, Grom meets and can recruit characters to form a party of up to five team mates.

Commanding your troops



Grom is essentially all about combat and utilises an interesting and quite intuitive control system combining familiar RPG/RTS standards and an action wheel. Selecting a character is a simple matter of either clicking on the character portrait or dragging a box around the characters selected. Left clicking on any point in the terrain moves the characters. Pressing space allows the player to deliver more tactical orders. Right clicking on any point on the screen and moving the mouse opens up the action wheel, allowing the player to change the posture of the characters. Making the

TIBETAN MYTHOLOGY

Although Grom claims to contain monsters inspired by Tibetan mythology, it's pretty obvious there was very little in the way of research done by the developers in this area. What we get are bog-standard demons, which are humanoid dressed in quasi-Tibetan garb that can be killed by normal and rather boring means. It would have been enjoyable to come up against some real Tibetan monsters, such as the Mole Ro'langs, which are Tibetan zombies raised from the dead either through the bite of another Ro'lang or by carrying hate in their heart. Mole Ro'langs can only be killed by piercing a hidden mole that causes them to fall apart.

characters sit or kneel makes them harder to spot and hit. Right clicking on a character portrait allows the player to set the aggressiveness level of the character, putting them in aggressive, defensive or free fire modes. Whilst all of this may sound good on paper it doesn't work nearly as well in real life. Combat is a messy affair - AI pathing is poor and you'll often find your characters moving across each other's line of sight, fouling shots and getting killed in the crossfire. Combat is also complicated with receiving hits and interrupting the current action. This wouldn't be so bad if enemies couldn't fire and reload faster than characters. To make matters worse, combat cannot be avoided - when you get into a battle the only way to leave the screen is to kill all the enemies in the area.

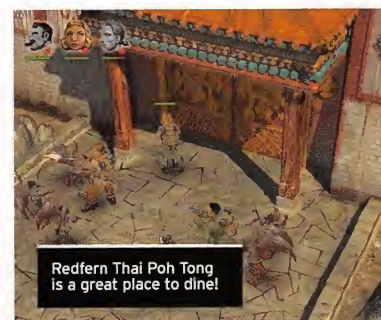
Grom combines elements of action roleplaying and small unit strategy but fails to equal the sum of its parts. Roleplaying elements come from some rather large

conversations that can be had with a number of NPC characters, but unlike most good RPG games there is little in the way of player choice. Conversations are necessary to get information for the next mission, but do little to add to the flavour of the game and sub quests are few and far between. To make matters worse, most of the conversations are peppered with what can be loosely termed as humour - bad jokes more likely to raise an eyebrow or groan. The only skill required in the game, apart from combat, is haggling. Haggling uses a novel and quite fun card game in which players pit mood cards (anger, disbelief, pleading, etc) against the AI to raise or lower the price of goods.

Yeah, but is she pretty?

The graphics and sound are adequate, but hardly anything to write home about. The pre-rendered backgrounds do look rather nice and the 3D characters are well animated, however they lack any real detail. Sound is patchy at best with frequent and poor voice acting, but there are some rousing tracks brought in with good timing making you want to kill a couple more Nazis. If you really need a fix of small unit tactical combat give Grom a shot, otherwise save your money for Commandos 3.

Daniel Wilks



SYSTEM

NEED

P2-350
128MB RAM
32MB 3D Videocard
800MB HDD

WANT

P3-500
256MB RAM
64MB 3D Videocard
800MB HDD

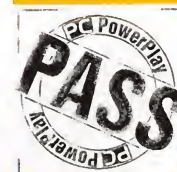
MULTIPLAYER

No

ONLINE

monstrous.com
We couldn't find a reference to the grotesque morning creatures skulking around the PCPP office before they're transformed by their first coffee. Or four.

RATING



OVERALL

Combining Indiana Jones and Commandos, Grom fails to live up to the sum of its parts.

55



1503 A.D. The New World

More sim and management than strategy

Developer: Sunflowers ■ Publisher: EA ■ Distributor: EA ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now

SYSTEM

NEED

P3-500
128MB RAM
16MB Videocard
800MB HDD

WANT

P4
256MB RAM
32MB Videocard
930MB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

collectingpez.com
That episode in Seinfeld did it for us: Pez dispensers are funny and, judging by the site, the collectors more so.

RATING



OVERALL

Hard work and perseverance will reward keen players. Ever tried self-flagellation?

63

1 602 A.D. (or Anno 1602 as it was fondly known as) was released a little over three years ago now and one would've at least expected with the time it took to deliver a sequel it would have included some serious R&D into the user interface. For, in a word, it sucked. And surprisingly, the same is true for its successor. Which is a shame, because there's a really solid empire building game behind the god-awful presentation; a game where user-friendliness has given way to sheer detail.

This game is a what?!

1503 A.D. The New World is all about nurturing a new settlement on foreign ground through rigid micro management. Although it's been termed a realtime strategy game by the marketing folk at EA, don't be fooled: warfare here is primitive and the diplomacy system lacking. No, fulfilment only comes in managing your citizens and building your empire.

And it all starts from the ground up, literally. Choosing a good site for your new colony is essential, as whatever you cannot directly manipulate from the landscape must be traded for later. There are 45 resources to

exploit, and each travels along an interdependent production line before its benefits can be realised. If you plan to start a war for example, you'll need to build the tools of war. First, iron ore must be extracted via a mine. This raw resource is then taken to a smelter where workable iron is produced. To power the smelter, you'll need wood, which can only be harvested after you've built the forester's hut. Unless you want the big guns and have taken the ore to the large ore smelter, which requires charcoal to run, and thereby adding another step – wood must be taken to the charcoal burner first. The processed ore is then taken one of the half-dozen weapons specialists, where it will be combined with another resource, which again, needs to be processed for the finished product. And you'll be limited to what you can produce by the level of education of your society and the amount of research you've committed to.

Oh! I thought you said...

The same level of detail extends to the tools of a thriving metropolis – your food, building resources and luxury items – and a thriving metropolis is the ultimate goal of 1503 A.D.

All this anal detail – did I mention it was made by Germans? – proves to be quite

charming and engaging, although getting to the stage where you can appreciate it won't be easy. Becoming proficient with the game mechanics proves to be the real challenge, and the interface is against you every step of the way. The control system lacks a good feedback system, with two near-dire consequences. Firstly, as there's no flagging of a unit's destination, keeping track of where they're going proves problematic. Secondly, as a result of relatively of poorly conceived art direction and lack of highlighting, units often get lost amongst the terrain. It's a characteristic flaw of 1503 A.D.; not quite a showstopper, but one that will challenge your tolerance and dedication. The same is true of the game's multitude of tabs in the info window. And the tutorial: while helpful, it in itself is a major trial.

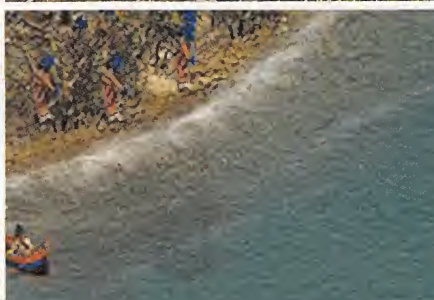
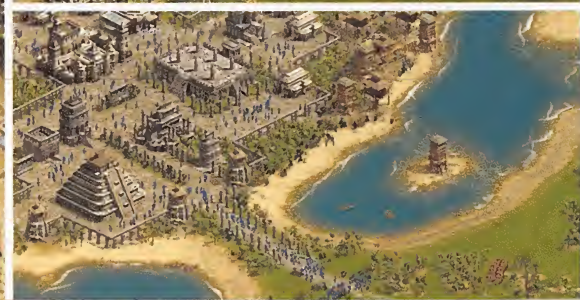
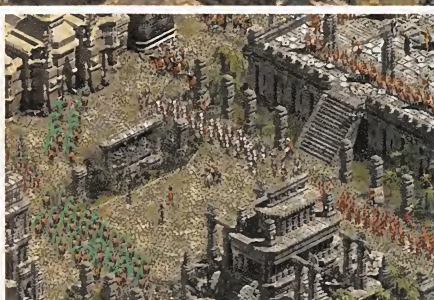
1503 A.D. is a singleplayer only affair with a handful of scenario missions and a decent campaign for some pre-scripted fun. But given that this title works best as an empire builder/management sim, it's the open-ended sandbox mode that will prove the most enjoyable. The New World may surprise you; anyone that likes their games nice and accessible should steer well clear of this one.

March Stepnik

UH, HELP

The printed manual gives an essential, yet basic, guide to doing stuff in the game, but it's the online help system where all the information is at and what you'll bring up constantly as you learn to play. Problem is, it's ugly, clunky, and text only. The tutorials are also essential, but all of the games' nuances are covered in just three of them. And you can't just skip to the relevant parts of each tutorial either – you have to suffer through each from the beginning if you want to brush up on some essential features. Yuck.





American Conquest

Strictly for historical and RTS fans

Developer: GSC Game World ■ Publisher: CDV ■ Distributor: QVS ■ Price: \$79.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now

If you are interested in real time combat action with a lot more depth, then you'll know the Cossacks series has been a shining light when compared to most games out there. American Conquest, a game developed by the same team, looks set to continue this tradition delivering complex and involving gameplay, and a number of historically based missions that chronicle the struggles that took place in colonial America or the New World.

The game lets you lead armies from around a dozen different factions and offers you campaigns and scenarios that span the years between 1492 and 1813. This makes for a game with a lot of scope and a host of historical scenarios.

There is a modicum of resource management, with six resources in total. Early on you will focus on harvesting crops and gathering wood just to get your settlement established, but later on more advanced resources like stone, iron, gold and coal come into play. Managing these isn't too hard even if it is frustrating sometimes when you are limited in the more precious resources and have a surplus of basic stuff.

Isometrically speaking

The action is observed using the all-familiar top down isometric view, with a zoomed in and longer-range option. Both are useful even if it would have been welcome if you had more options, as neither is ideal.

The interface is workable, but also frustrating at times. Selecting troops is awkward and they are sometimes obscured by the massive structures you can build. You also have to be very precise in selecting troops. While dragging and dropping en masse makes it easy enough to select large groups, identifying specific types of units by double clicking on a single unit is fiddly.

Visually, this game is never going to push your trick graphics card to the outer

THE PATH TO EXCELLENCE

In American Conquest, the path-finding skills are at times sub standard. This is something we regularly discover in RTS games and it is also always very irritating. You might think giving units the cognitive skills to manoeuvre around the sneaky tree that has leapt out in front of them isn't that hard a task. However, time and time again, we come up against digital dullards who, instead, crash into static objects. You'd think with all of the more complex AI tasks that befall a game's development team, sorting simple terrain negotiation skills would be one of the easier jobs on the menu, but the bugbear of dodgy path finding skills remains. We say it is time to stop using up resources for less important stuff like pre-rendered animations you only see once and focus on path finding as a priority.

limits of its performance envelope, but as we keep saying with strategy games you can often get away with adequate graphics as long as the gameplay is solid enough. This is indeed the case with American Conquest.

Form up... cut loose!

Battles are very much large formation affairs, with you utilising your different troop types in the role that suits them best. If you like the idea of controlling gargantuan armies, with literally hundreds of troops taking the field at the one time then American Conquest will make you smile. Controlling such massive numbers is only easy if you adopt a formation driven approach and it is the effective use of formations under pressure that will save the day. In this sense, American Conquest is similar to that RTS classic, Medieval, however, you will find that formation management in American



Conquest could have been made easier.

There are a few strange elements in the game's design. For a start, while it is useful in defence to garrison men inside buildings, as they can fire at the enemy while also seeking shelter, oddly enough you cannot train units and have your garrisoned units firing at the same time. This simply doesn't make any sense and it is very annoying.

American Conquest is going to please some of you. It delivers, at times, complex combat with decent anchors in historical reality and there is a smorgasbord of different unit types and buildings. The different tech trees and factions will also keep you coming back for more. That said, the gameplay can be fiddly and the interface is a flawed gem at best. One for the RTS hardcore.

Steve Polak

SYSTEM

NEED

P2-450
64MB RAM
DirectX 1024x768
800MB HDD

WANT

P3-733
256MB RAM
32MB Videocard
1.38G HDD

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

mars.jpl.nasa.gov
A pathfinder in a space exploration sense. Check out the images gallery for some awesome shots of Mars.

RATING



OVERALL

Workmanlike and worth a look if a fan of the genre or period.

74

Intel I875P Canterwood Motherboard

■ Price: TBA ■ Distributor: Intel ■ URL: www.intel.com

The new 875P Canterwood chipset for Pentium 4s running Dual DDR400 RAM will replace the 850E in the performance and professional market. It's kind of a stop-gap solution, since Intel still wants to bring the Springdale-G chipset to the market this quarter. This chipset, with its slightly reduced set of features, should be less expensive than the 875P. However, the Springdale will be equipped with 200 MHz FSB as well.

The 875P chipset marks a few milestones for Intel; for starters, it finally shows Intel as a company that does listen to the needs and requests of its customers - mainly in its support for DDR400 memory technology. Embracing DDR400 SDRAM is something we never thought we would see Intel do, especially considering their stance on the technology in the past.

Enabling 800MHz FSB support on the 875P chipset itself was more of a validation task for Intel; in fact, the amount of work Intel had to do to enable the support was relatively minimal considering many 845PE chipsets will work fine at the increased frequency.

Need to upgrade CPU

One Drawback of the I875P chipset is its removal of the 400MHz FSB. This means if you want to use an I875P, you will need either a new 533MHz or 800MHz FSB CPU. Springdale-G will, however, support 400, 533, and 800MHz FSB chips, so the upgrade cost has the potential to be considerably less.

The memory controller on the I875P is a new generation controller. Using technology first introduced by nVIDIA nForce chipsets, it's a 128 bit dual Channel DDR piece. Supporting two channels for up to 4GB of RAM in 4 DIMM slots Intel achieves a Dual Channel Architecture equivalent to that used by the nForce2.

One rather unexpected surprise on the I875P chipset is the inclusion of DDR400 support. Normally, Intel has waited for JEDEC to support a standard before it adopts it; after all, the CPU giant took its time after JEDEC adopted DDR333. DDR400 memory alone in single channel supports a max theoretical bandwidth of 3.2GBs, using Dual Channel you get 6.4GBs, the same bandwidth speed that the 800MHz FSB P4 is able to generate.

Ethernet enhancements

Gigabit Ethernet is slowly becoming the new standard for networks. Gigabit Ethernet allows 1000 megabit along standard

Cat5E Ethernet cable. This is a great increase in bandwidth, but it comes at a price. Using the PCI interface increases a bottleneck on the PCI bus. With other devices like RAID and Sound systems, the PCI bus can't handle the increased load of gigabit Ethernet. Intel's latest approach is to incorporate a new bus directly into the Northbridge, called Communications System Architecture or CSA. The CSA is a second hublink architecture running at 266MBs, similar to the PCI64 bandwidth. And it is this that allows for a direct connection to the Northbridge.

The Intel I/O Controller Hub version 5 is the newest controller chip designed to work with the I875P and I865 chipsets. Without a doubt is the one of the most awaited hubs from Intel. There are two major features of ICH5 that separate it from its predecessor, ICH4; the first feature is integrated support for a total of 8 USB 2.0 ports. Intel claims that this is the last time they will be upping the number of USB ports supported as 8 seems to meet the current and future demand.

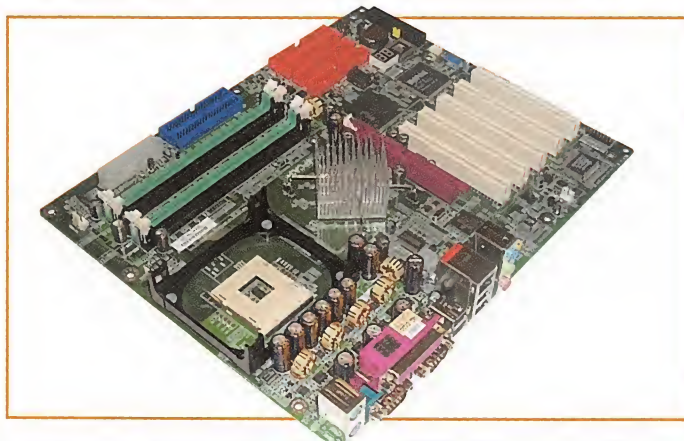
Native serial ATA

The next and, by far, the most important feature is the Native support for Serial ATA. Up 'til now, if you wanted Serial ATA you needed to have a Promise, Highpoint or Silicon Image Serial ATA controller chips on the board. Intel is the first of the Chipset manufacturers to have a Serial ATA controller built into its Southbridge.

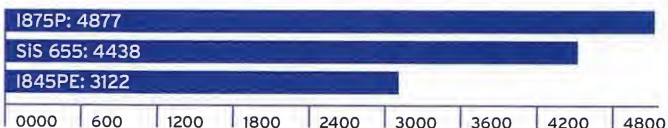
The Serial ATA controller has a direct link to the Hub Link 2.0 interface in ICH5 and thus can offer a full 150MB/s per channel. ICH5 features two Serial ATA channels (supporting a maximum of two drives) and two Parallel ATA channels (supporting a maximum of four drives), all of which may be enabled and used concurrently. Intel also gives another reason to say goodbye to third party SATA controllers - the inclusion of RAID function in the ICH5R version. This allows you to use RAID 0 or 1 on the Serial ATA drives connected to the ICH5R.

Make no mistake, this is an impressive board. Although final prices are yet to be confirmed, it looks like it will prove to be expensive. There's also a whole bunch of functionality on the Canterwood that you may never use, such as ECC RAM. It's clear that you would be well advised to wait for Springdale's benchmarks before deciding for sure on your next upgrade.

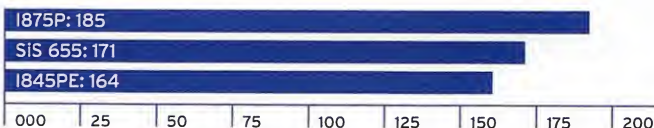
Cameron Johnson



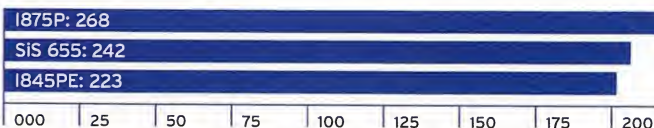
3DMark03 1024x768x32 (3DMarks)



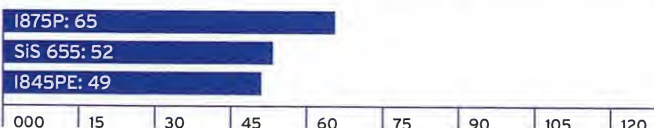
UT 2003 1024x768x32 (FPS)



Sysmark 2002 Business (Sysmarks)



MPEG Encoding DVD to DIVX 5.04 (FPS)



Motherf**king motherboards

There used to be a time when selecting a motherboard was simple, there were only three choices, and your friendly systems integrator usually made the decision for you. Can you imagine, in that strange and distant time, when cracking open the machine after having used the thing for two years was the first time you realised you had onboard

graphics? When PCI was just a twinkle in IEEE's eye and keyboard ports were as thick as the severed wrist of an infant? In the early nineties, we had machines so primitive the CPUs didn't even need cooling. At all. When we saw the first heatsinks - no fans mind you - we thought "Wow, what crappy thermal engineering!" Those were the days.

PCPP Score

You will need a good reason to purchase this chipset. It marks a significant step forward for Intel with DDR400 and native Serial ATA support, but the soon to be released Springdale chipset may be better priced.

89

Abit Siluro GeForceFX 5800

■ Price: \$850 ■ Distributor: Altec ■ URL: www.altec.com.au

The GeForceFX 5800 is rushed technology. It is a hastily designed chipset positioned inelegantly against ATI's Radeon 9700 Pro in a vain hope to prevent users from choosing ATI's new 9800 over an nVIDIA product. And yet, the FX5800 doesn't even perform as well as the 9700 Pro. If the FX5800 was about the same price as the 9700 Pro, it's lacklustre performance on release wouldn't upset us too much, because nVIDIA has an excellent history of driver revisions that can sometimes improve performance up to 30%. No, the real problem with the FX5800 is its physical design.

Hideous

To put it plainly, this card is a monster. The core chip is such a thermal nightmare it requires a cooling system that looks like it would be more at home under the bonnet of a very old, but impeccably cared for muscle car. Giant chunks of copper jut out into space. Huge fans spin at fantastic velocities to pump superheated air out the back of your PC. Pipes and steel clips are poised ready to gouge your fingers and give you blood poisoning. The card even takes up two whole PCI ports on the back of the machine to make space for its enormous cooler.

Compare this to ATI's 9700 Pro which performs better than this Abit card, but needs hardly any cooling at all beyond a small fan.

Like the 9700 Pro, the FX5800 requires extra power, but unlike the 9700 Pro it requires a whole molex connector like you plug in to your hard drive or CD-ROM. This can make for an awkward tangle of cables inside the machine for a start, and in extreme cases necessitate a PSU upgrade to something of a higher wattage - 250w just ain't gonna cut it anymore, folks.

Benchmarks

We used Emagen's AthlonXP 2700+ PC for testing as it came with a 9700 Pro for comparison. All we changed here was the videocard, and we used Abit's own drivers that came in the impressive box (more on the box shortly). Nothing else.

To be frank, again, the FX5800's performance was really, really disappointing. In 3DMark2001 SE tests, which don't even stress the advanced DirectX 9 abilities of the card, the FX5800 came in behind the 9700 Pro in both Full Scene Anti-Aliasing and normal modes. This despite all the fancy cooling and high clock speeds of the Abit card.

When it came to 3DMark03, we could see immediately why nVIDIA hates this benchmarking program so much. While the 9700 Pro clocked a respectable 4636 3Dmarks, the FX5800 returned a staggeringly poor 2797 - only a little more than half.

Of course, a lot of this has to do with how the FX5800 is designed, and nVIDIA has spoken at length about the unrealistic nature of the 3DMark03 testing environment. But the company never had a problem with 3DMark2001 SE.

At the end of the day, the results clearly show that for your top-performing AGP8x DirectX 9.0 compatible card, the GeForceFX 5800 is clearly not a sensible choice.

Abit's efforts

So, we've established that, now let's take a quick look at Abit's implementation of this flawed chipset. The Siluro, as it's called, is clearly marketed as a top-tier product, despite not having the ultimate FX chipset, the 5800 Ultra. An Ultra model is also available however, and we can assume the build quality is identical.

The card comes in the fanciest wooden box you ever saw, made up of two levels with a secret drawer in the bottom that holds all the manuals and driver CDs and whatnot. Scooping back the fancy paper wrapping from around the static bag upstairs however, you'll find a very solid piece of kit indeed. As mentioned elsewhere, the card weighs about 1.4 kilos thanks to all the copper bolted to the PCB, and it has an exciting (or stupid, depending on your perspective) transparent fan and duct that includes red and green LEDs that light up when the PC is powered on.

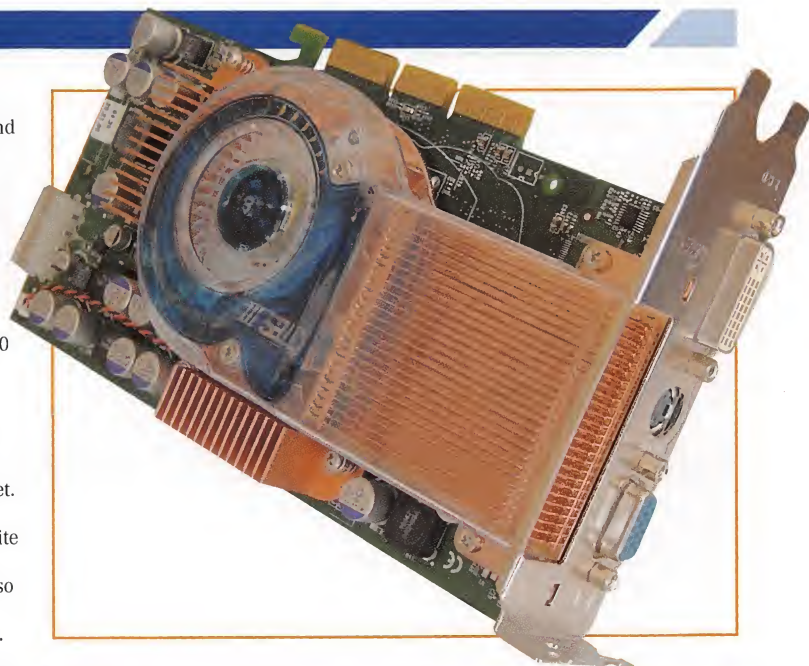
Abit's cooling solution is called OTES - the Outside Thermal Exhaust System. One of the big problems with engineering sample FX cards was their huge noise. Fortunately, the OTES is relatively quiet. It still adds to the total decibel output of your case but not really significantly. If you're a case modder with six extra fans, for instance, you probably won't notice it at all.

The card is easy to install although the Abit drivers haven't been digitally signed by Microsoft, so WindowsXP loves to put up a bunch of scary warnings, which you can safely ignore. There's also a pack of software, although there are no full version games, which is a little disappointing for a card at this price.

Should I get it?

At the end of the day, the FX5800 is simply not a sensible choice for anyone except an insane modder who likes the look of the massive cooling system and its coloured fan lights. Performance lags behind cheaper products, it's heavy, it takes up too much space and it sucks power like a very suckful thing. Abit has done a stellar job of implementing the chipset onto their impeccably built card, but it's a waste of good engineering. Wait for driver revisions before making a final decision.

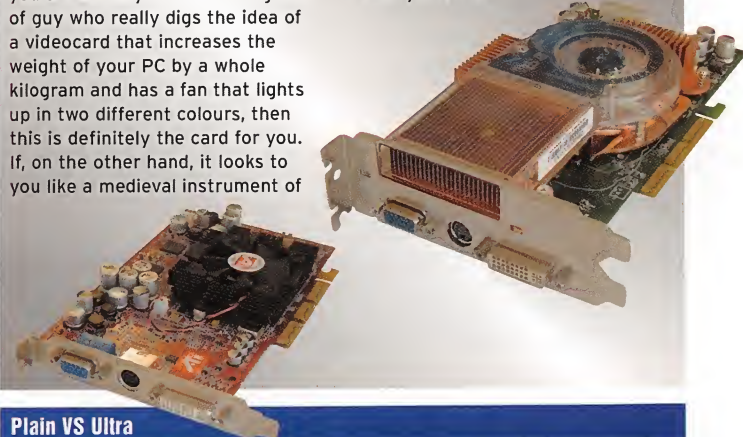
Anthony Fordham



Spot the difference

Here's the Siluro FX5800 pictured next to ATI's Radeon 9700 Pro. If you are a crazy case-modding kind of guy who really digs the idea of a videocard that increases the weight of your PC by a whole kilogram and has a fan that lights up in two different colours, then this is definitely the card for you. If, on the other hand, it looks to you like a medieval instrument of

torture, maybe ATI's cheaper and better performing product would suit you better.



Plain VS Ultra

The FX5800 is not quite the flagship of nVIDIA's new age - there's an Ultra model also available. The main difference is a 500MHz core over the plain FX5800's 400MHz. Alas, benchmark results are probably not going to be spectacularly

different. At this stage, all hope for the card lies in the next iteration of nVIDIA's Detonator drivers. Can the core be saved? Or should we all avoid it until the next generation and stick with ATI? That's a rhetorical question, by the way.

3DMark03 1024x768x32 (3Dmarks)

ATI Radeon: 9700 Pro: 4634									
Abit Siluro: FX5800: 2797									
0000	625	1250	1875	2500	3125	3750	4375	5000	

PCPP Score

The most excitingly packaged videocard ever unwraps into a heavy, clunky, poorly performing disappointment. Driver revisions may fix the problem, but don't hold your breath.

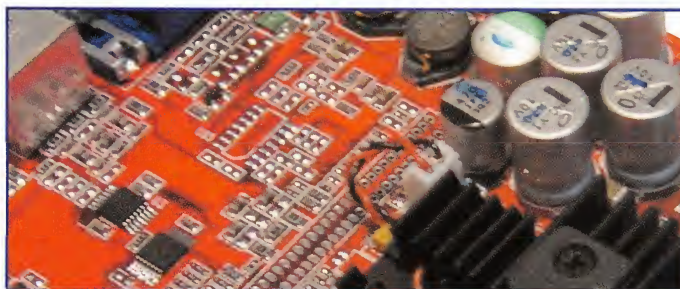
68

Radeon 9700 Pro Showdown

Shawn Baker takes a couple of the fastest videocards in the business for a spin

With the Radeon 9800 Pro just around the corner, the current speed king will no doubt get a nice little drop in price. The 9700 Pro is currently leading the pack in front of every card available on the retail market including the overpriced, new generation GeForceFX. This month we are going to have a look at 2 cards, a Powercolor

which pretty much follows ATI's reference design and a very chunky Gigabyte card. It will be interesting to see if Gigabyte has placed a big gold heat sink on there for a reason, or does it run just like the card following the reference design. Well, let's pull out a few programs, a 9500 Pro, 2 of the hottest 9700 Pros and let the reviews speak for themselves.



Powercolor Evil Commando 2

■ Price: \$640 ■ Distributor: Altech ■ URL: www.altech.com.au

The Powercolor 9700 Pro has been labeled as the Evil Commando 2 and has quite a spiffy box design, so it doesn't look to bad at all. Turning the box over, you notice an extensive list of features explaining how the 9700 Pro is capable of Direct X 9 Support, AGP 8X, etc. Unfortunately, the reality of the software package isn't all that exciting - out of the seven games six of them are called Lite Games, which we presume to be demos. Included are TV out cables and a DVI to VGA adapter, so you can use the multi monitor function the Radeon supports. The card is an absolute replica of the reference model from ATI and even uses the fan with the ATI logo on it. It seems Powercolor has simply designed a new box and plonked ATI's

card inside. Fortunately, there is nothing wrong with the reference model and shouldn't have any problems keeping up with the Gigabyte card, unless you've done a little bit of extra tweaking. Priced slightly cheaper than the Gigabyte Radeon, you do realise what happens when you include more programs. The Powercolor is only slightly behind, but the card is cheaper and some are trying to stay under the \$650 mark. The card does lack some decent cooling and memory sinks, which will hinder the card's overclocking speeds. However, this won't bother some, as they'll be more than happy with the power the card can produce. If you're thrifty, you may find the 9500 Pro a good option as it really does hold itself together well in the lower resolutions.

PCPP Score

An excellent card that can hold its own against its higher-priced competition.

88



Gigabyte Maya 2 Radeon 9700 Pro

■ Price: \$695 ■ Distributor: Synnex ■ URL: www.synnex.com.au

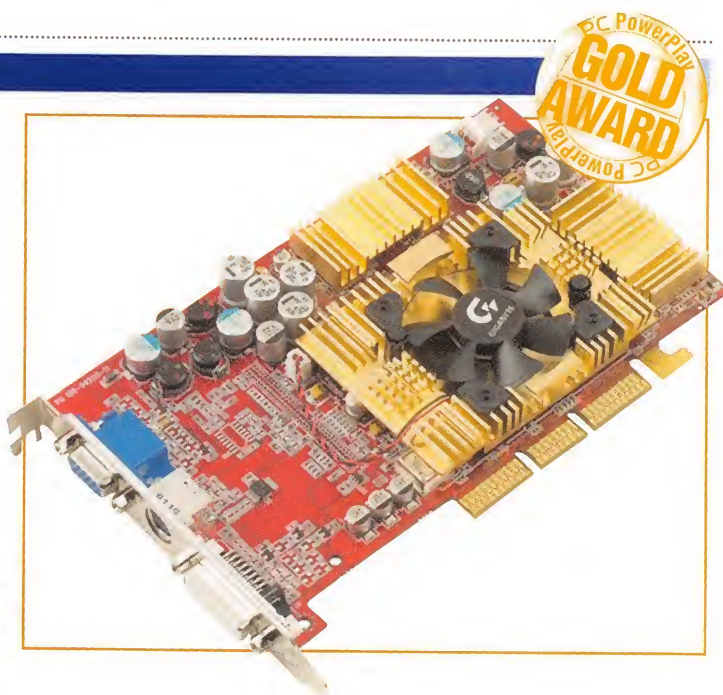
The Gigabyte Radeon 9700 Pro is labeled as part of the Maya 2 series and what this means is you get maximum bang for your buck. This means you not only receive the card with a massive gold heatsink fan, but also five games with titles such as Oni and Heavy Metal FAKK 2, PowerDVD XP Version 4 and the driver CD. On top of that, you also get the necessary cables to plug the extra power into, and the DVI to VGA adapter, so you can use your TV as a monitor. Overall, the package is a lot more fulfilling than the Powercolor when, at the end of the day, some people don't

care much for the software when compared to price. The Gigabyte card is definitely one of the more unique looking cards and it can easily be told apart from others due to its massive heatsink fan located on top of the VPU. The card follows the red design like the Powercolor and most of the other cards running the 9700 Pro chipset. The Gigabyte card does pull slightly ahead over the Powercolor, but this comes to an insignificant amount, so the software bundle will let you decide whether it is worth spending the extra \$55. One advantage the Gigabyte has is it's easily available around Australia, so you shouldn't have any trouble finding one.

PCPP Score

While you pay a little more you get a lot of extras and the cooling is much more suited to the overclocker.

91



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Emagen AthlonXP 2700+ Gaming PC

■ Price: \$3000 ■ Distributor: Emagen ■ URL: www.emagen.com.au

When Emagen heard how we took a look at a couple of \$3000 gaming towers last month, they insisted it could do better. So, it submitted an AthlonXP 2700+ machine built around an ASUS A7N8X nForce2 motherboard. The two machines we had in last month formed opposite ends of the price spectrum. On the one hand, we had the blazingly fast, but CDRW-less Metalbox Pentium4-based machine, and on the other hand, we had Altech's AthlonXP monster with a full tower case and all the trimmings. Emagen's machine bridges the gap admirably, providing performance nearly on par with Metalbox's beast, while including all the extras, such as a 16x DVD-ROM and a 52x burner. Graphics are powered by ATI's own Radeon 9700 Pro, which is an admirable card indeed, especially as it doesn't require complicated or noisy cooling systems. Of course, that does limit overclocking potential somewhat, but if you're really that keen you could always buy a new fan and some RAM heatsinks and glue 'em on. The PC comes with 512MB of Kingston ValueRAM, which again doesn't have any cooling solution, so overclockers will have to purchase

extra heatsinks.

Storage takes the form of an 80GB serial ATA HDD from Seagate, a very admirable piece of kit indeed. In these days of videocards that require extra power and cables strung willy-nilly around the inside of a case, serial ATA is becoming more and more de rigueur. Speaking of build quality, this is where Emagen's PC really shines. The inside of the Antech case is nothing less than spotless, with all cables secured well out of the way of airflow. Not having a soundcard or modem certainly doesn't hurt, although while the motherboard is easily able to handle 6-channel sound, a modem would have been nice, since dialup will still take years to finally die out. The most pleasing aspect of this PC is, of course, performance. Emagen's machine comes in only slightly behind Metalbox's Pentium4 powerhouse in both the 3DMark and UT2k3 tests. Metalbox is still the leader for raw performance. Altech still gets brownie points for its inclusion of a modem. But Emagen provides the best balance of completeness and performance at this price point. As a result, this machine comes highly recommended.

Jack Kulyk



PCPP Score

Hits a sweet spot between performance and features. A clean build serves as a good backbone for modding. A very complete system.

86

nVIDIA GeForceFX 5600 Ultra

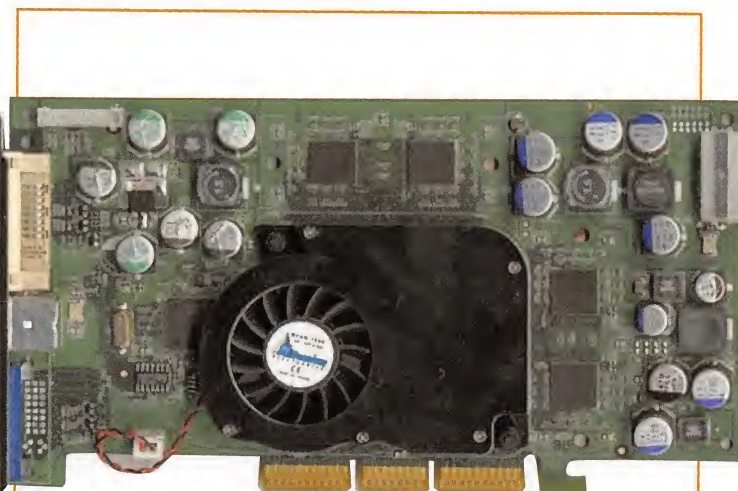
■ Price: About \$600 ■ Distributor: Various ■ URL: www.nvidia.com

While the disappointing FX5800 is nVIDIA's new graphics flagship, the company has grand plans to be the first manufacturer to offer DirectX 9.0 support at all price points. The FX5600 is the top end of this new spectrum of cards. So, is it worth the upgrade?

What nVIDIA clearly hopes to do is learn from the mistake of the GeForce4 MX, which carried the GeForce4 name, but was in no way, shape or form, a DirectX 8 card. In fact, it was much more like a GeForce2 MX than it was a GeForce4, despite its name. With the introduction of the FX range though, all market segments would have identical feature sets and would only differ based on performance - the way it should have been to begin with. nVIDIA's GPUs are actually designed a bit differently these days, which is what allows nVIDIA to launch a plethora of GPUs that cover all market segments at around the same time with identical feature sets. nVIDIA has compromised their verilog code with the FX, which is why we see

that even despite the FX's delays, the derivatives of the core (NV31/34) are still on track. So, to the GeForce FX 5600 Ultra, which ships in with a 350MHz core clock and 350MHz DDR memory clock. It, thus, has more memory bandwidth than a GeForce4 Ti 4600, and makes more efficient use of the bandwidth, thanks to much improved memory controller and colour/Z compression. Although the 5600 Ultra has a higher core clock than the Ti 4600, it has a lower multitextured fill rate (the NV31 has four pipes with one texture unit per pipe vs GeForce4's four pipes with two texture units per pipe), which will hurt performance significantly in situations that aren't overly memory bandwidth limited. Unfortunately, though the performance of this card really fails to justify its existence. An FX might be attractive at the very low end with low costs and high feature set, but up towards the top you are much better off buying an ATI card.

Cameron Johnson



PCPP Score

Another disappointment from the FX lineup. Poor benchmark performance does nothing to make this card a serious candidate for your cash.

59

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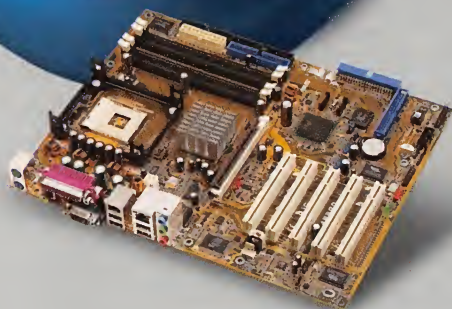
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- ATX Form Factor

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2.1 Speaker Showdown

Jack Kulyck takes a shrewd and suspicious listen to a couple of speaker systems

In these days of 6-channel speaker setups that look like slightly miniaturised versions of the Sydney skyline and dominate your house and your life, you could be forgiven for just wanting a simple pair of decent-sounding speakers to play ordinary games through. Fortunately, these speakers still exist, out there, and are looking funkier by the day.

JBL Creature 2.1

■ Price: \$299 ■ Distributor: Conexus ■ URL: www.conexus.com.au

The big curvaceous thing is, of course, the subwoofer, which has a down-facing main driver and weird silver controls for bass and treble levels. Irritatingly, the power switch is located all the way over the back of the sub under an awkward lip of moulded plastic, so you will probably usually switch these off at the wall. The satellites of both speaker sets in this showdown use driver discs suspended over flexible foam or polyurethane rather than the older paper cone model, so they both look excitingly futuristic and funky. However, while the Creative I-Trigues have three 5cm drivers for each satellite, the Creatures only have one each. And this is where the funky design falls down - the ultra-compact satellites just don't have the power of

Here's a couple of products that go beyond the standard black oblong and aim to provide fabulous sound at a normal person's price point - less than \$300. If you're currently still using the Sound Blaster speakers that came free with your SB Pro in 1993, then either of these systems will offer a dramatic improvement to your gaming life. Now choose!



Creative's offering, and when music or game audio gets complex with an EAX environment overlaid with a bunch of explosions, comms chatter and game music, the Creatures have a tendency to sound a bit confused. This is also true of music. Base-heavy simple stuff sounds chunky enough, but music from the finer arts does come across a little flat. If you plug in an album famous for its audio engineering such as Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*, you'll miss out on a lot of the subtle background detail - although Floyd detractors would say this is no bad thing. The Creatures are a fine set of speakers and only really lose this showdown because of the price. A bit of design is welcome in this age of bland functionality, but it's a shame JBL has sacrificed a little performance in design's name.



PCPP Score

Beautifully built, very compact, but let down by slightly inferior performance

81

Creative I-Trigue 2.1

■ Price: \$259 ■ Distributor: Creative ■ URL: www.australia.creative.com

Creative has admirably provided a wired remote for this speaker set, bringing all volume, power and bass adjustment functions up to the desktop. This means you won't have to continually dive under the desk to turn the speakers on and off. Once you've positioned your sub where you want it, the I-Trigues show only the two slim satellites, which each have three 5cm drivers suspended on durable polyurethane. Having three times as many active sound-generating units as the Creatures really gives the I-Trigues an advantage. For a start, the speakers

are louder. And when the game action heats up, there's none of the muddy confusion of complex soundscapes found in the Creatures. The I-Trigues also works very well for music, easily eclipsing most desktop stereo systems at even \$100 above this price point. If there are any complaints with this system at all, it's that the wires connecting the very light satellites to the subwoofer are perhaps a little heavy for the satellites, so they will try and tip over if the wire has a twist or a kink in it. When it comes to making a final decision, the I-Trigues are definitely the wiser choice, offering better sound, more ergonomic controls and of course a lower price.



PCPP Score

At this price, the best 2.1 speaker solution for your PC currently available

90



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Swiftech H2O-8500PV CPU Water Cooler

■ Price: \$420 ■ Distributor: PC Case Gear ■ URL: www.pccasegear.com.au

Mention of water in someone's PC and you can quickly see a shiver down their spine. As soon as you jump from air cooling to water, you are hitting that point of extreme cooling. A lot of people still don't have the guts or, indeed, the need to jump to water cooling and a lot of people for this reason find themselves using the stock heatsink and fan that comes with their processor.

If you are a beginner to water cooling it is definitely worth considering a 'kit', something that comes with everything you need to get straight into it. Later, you can then look at upgrading radiators, pumps, etc. Two kits are readily available at the moment, the ThermalTake kit, which concentrates more on a quiet system than a high performance kit, the other is the Swiftech kit, which we are looking at today.

Swiftech's kit is designed for the more hardcore water cooling user and isn't really aimed at the beginner like the ThermalTake kit. Included in the package is everything you need to get the system up and running, water block, radiator, pump and enough tubing for any full tower case. When it comes to water cooling it's definitely

worth having a read of the instructions and setting it up before the components are in the computer, this will, of course, give you the ability to test for leaks.

As long as you have a good read of the instructions you shouldn't have too much of a problem installing it, as long as you know where you want to place the radiator. The pump with bleeding valves is mounted into two 5 1/4-inch slots, so it is defiantly worth making note and checking if you have the room to install it with ease before purchasing.

Once installed, you really do begin to notice the difference of water cooling with temperatures sitting between 1C and 3C above ambient temperatures. If your average case temperature is in the high 20s, you should notice a very low 30s running temperature, this of course gives you the ability to push more voltage into the processor and get the most out of it as far as overclocking goes. There is also an option to get a Video Block at a discounted price when purchasing the kit, so if you want to water cool the two main components in your system this is definitely worth taking note of.

Shawn Baker



PCPP Score

An excellent kit tailored for the experienced user. Beginners should probably look elsewhere, but cooling results are admirable.

81

Lian Li

Fish Tank Side Panel

■ Price: \$155 ■ Distributor: Anyware ■ URL: www.anyware.com.au

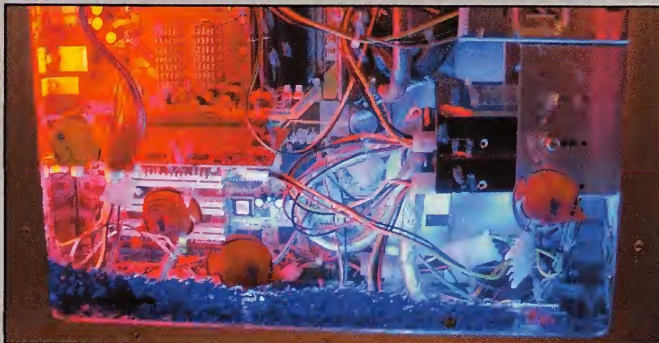
If you're lucky enough to be the owner of a Lian Li case, this may be the item of the year for you. The new Lian Li Aqua Panel brings the joys of water without it touching your hardware, thanks to a little plastic box installed securely into the side panel. The contents of the package includes

five little plastic fishes, some beads to give a gravel kind of effect, a pump which hooks up to your molex connector and a neon light to give it a blue glow. Installation is a breeze, but you would defiantly benefit from your own cold cathode, as Lian Li's neon isn't very bright.

PCPP Score

Faultless construction, good technology, but sadly loses out in the benchmarks. However, if you can get it cheap, it's worth it

79



Custom Cases Window Applique

■ Price: \$15 ■ Distributor: JPIT Custom Cases ■ URL: www.customcases.com.au

You haven't modded your case until you have a window. Whether it's a pre made one or a custom job it doesn't really matter, a case mod isn't complete with out it. A window applique is designed to give that little bit extra to the externals of your case. Custom Cases has the largest

collection of appliques in Australia and you shouldn't have a problem finding one to match your taste. The applique, squeegee and instructions are included to make installation a breeze. The product is very basic, simple to install and fantastically priced, so there is no reason you shouldn't purchase one for your window.

PCPP Score

One of those basic products that do a lot for your case at a low price.

91



PRE-MODDED CASE SHOWDOWN

Shawn Baker inserts his throbbing kit in four of the top cases on today's market

As case modding gets increasingly popular, we are coming to the point where cases are being released to us in a pre-modded state. Some of the major contenders in this department are Antec, ThermalTake and Lian-Li. We will be looking at the wild side

of cases from these companies and see if they have what it takes to store all your favorite hardware in or, more importantly, those cold cathodes. So without further ado, let's march in and see who comes out on top and provides us with the best features available.



Lian-Li PC-6087A

■ Price: \$370 ■ Distributor: Anyware ■ URL: anyware.com.au

Lian-Li was one of the first companies to hit Australian shores with an all-aluminum case. The 6087A brings a great looking and lightweight case to the masses complete with excellent placement of four fan airflow, which is in no way going to be a hassle. So, thanks to its light weight there isn't going to be a problem carting it back and forth to LANs. Unfortunately, the PC-6087A is let down by not including a power supply of any kind, which we're used to from Lian Li, hopefully in the near future this will change. Some people will not like the inclusion of the door on the front and will find it a bit of a hassle; others will like the ability to hide their drives. This

very cool looking case is very easy to work with thanks to the removable motherboard tray. Lian Li busts out again!



PCPP Score

Another excellent case from Lian-Li, a company that really doesn't cut corners on its cases.

88

ThermalTake Xaser 3 V2000+

■ Price: \$468 ■ Distributor: PC Case Gear ■ URL: pccasegear.com.au

This is ThermalTake's second attempt at a pre-modded case - it was made famous with an excellent rework on the original Chiftech case that due its great looks and price is so well known to people. The V2000+ is the biggest case of the lot and while it doesn't have a slide out motherboard tray, it isn't too bad to work with. The inclusion of seven fans is more than enough to keep those expensive items inside at a safe temperature. With so many fans, you would expect a large amount of noise, but it really is very quite thanks to the low fan RPM. The Xaser 3 series is also available in a steel version, instead of aluminium,

which is available in Blue and Black. Being steel, it also brings the cost down; this may be a better option for some.



PCPP Score

The most expensive case out of the 4 and doesn't have all the features of the Lian-Li.

77

Antec Sonata

■ Price: \$199 ■ Distributor: PC Case Gear ■ URL: pccasegear.com.au

At first glance, this case looks amazing with its piano black finish; it's so shiny you can just about see your reflection. Designed with silence in mind, instead of an 80mm fan at the back a 120mm ultra low spinning fan is included, so it is capable of pushing more air at lower speeds. Being one of the smallest cases in the group with no motherboard tray, it is definitely one of the harder cases to work in. Since it is made of steel, it is also quite heavy for its size. The case doesn't offer all the fancy features that Lian-Li and ThermalTake have on offer, but it's a nice looking and superbly quiet case, designed for people who want to keep the noise

to a minimum. It also comes with a 380Watt super quiet Antec Power Supply.



PCPP Score

A very attractive case at an excellent price, unfortunately being made of steel, it is quite heavy.

87

Antec Lanboy

■ Price: \$190 ■ Distributor: PC Case Gear ■ URL: pccasegear.com.au

LANing is defiantly growing and more and more people are getting sick of carrying a 20 kilogram beast to and from venues. The Lanboy is designed for the LANer, lightweight, funky window and a carry strap. What more could you ask for? Like the Sonata, it is a smaller case and, unfortunately, is harder to work on inside, but this shouldn't be a problem for most LANers. Included are two 80mm fans to help push enough air through this little case. The window is fantastic since you can simply add a little cold cathode in, some rounded cables and in no time, you will have an excellent looking lightweight case. Priced very reasonably you couldn't ask for a

much better case, and we will, no doubt, see many of these little beauties popping up at local LAN events. Included is a 350Watt True Blue PSU, so this is excellent value for money.



PCPP Score

An excellent cooler, our only real criticism is the curious installation method that forces you to dismantle your whole PC

89

THE BEAST

THE MOST POWERFUL GAMING PC GOOD MONEY CAN BUY

We've handed the Beast over to those clever fellows at TweakTown and they've made some tasty changes to the Beast we know and love. Prepare for a new age of extreme performance!

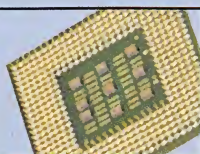


CPU, MEMORY AND MOTHERBOARD

Intel Pentium 4 3.06Ghz (With Hyper Threading)

Currently the fastest processor on the market in terms of raw clock speed, you've got yourself a seriously fast start to your Beast setup.

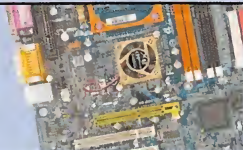
\$1298 www.cougar.com.au



Gigabyte GA-8INXP (E7205 Granite Bay)

With Dual Channel memory support through Intel's new Granite Bay chipset, the GA-8INXP mobo is one of the hottest motherboards for the Pentium 4 to reach our shores.

\$470 www.scorpzec.com.au



2GB Corsair XMS3200 TwinX

Corsair TwinX sticks of fast PC3200 DDR SD-RAM work best in your Dual Channel GA-8INXP giving trouble-free operation, and leaving you with memory to burn.

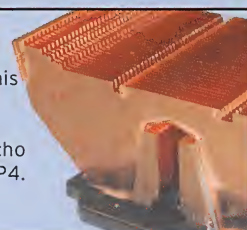
\$1600 www.altech.com.au



Thermalright SLK-900U HSF

Awarded the PCPP Gold Award in this issue, the goliath all-copper Thermalright SLK-900U is the best heatsink money can buy giving mucho headroom to clock your shiny new P4.

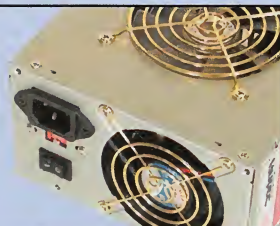
\$110 www.pccasegear.com



Antec TruePower 550W PSU

Sticking with tradition, the Antec True Power PSU is the undisputed king when it comes to powering your PC, and with 550 watts to boot, it'll do it no sweat.

\$199 www.pccasegear.com



VIDEO SYSTEM AND AUDIO

ATI Radeon 9700 Pro

Until nVIDIA's decibel Queen GeForce FX and ATI's new and improved Radeon 9800 hit us, the Radeon 9700 Pro is still the beastly card of choice

\$695 www.scorpzec.com.au



Creative Audigy 2 Platinum

Bringing 6.1 Dolby Digital EX and future 24-bit DVD Audio to the masses, the Creative Audigy 2 Platinum is a must have for any serious gamer

\$441 www.techbuy.com.au



Logitech Z680 THX Speaker System

With 450 watt RMS and true 5.1 digital sound through its own built-in Dolby Digital and DTS hardware decoder, this speaker set will certainly have your neighbours ducking for cover.

\$629 www.computeralliance.com.au



Sony MDR-DS5100 Wireless Dolby Headphones

To avoid that knock on the door from annoyed neighbours with noise complaints, a set of Sony MDR-DS5100 Wireless Dolby Headphones with 5.1 virtual sound is your answer.

\$1200 www.sony.com.au



Pinnacle Systems DC1000 MPEG-2 Video Editing

Become a professional Hollywood film producer over night with Pinnacle Systems DC1000 video capture editing package

\$3550 www.scorpzec.com.au



LATEST ADDITION

2GB Corsair XMS3200 TwinX

Ever since we went to Pentium 4 all those months ago, the Beast has used RDRAM for memory, partly because it gave superior performance to DDR and partly because we lived in hope that prices would one day return to Earth. But with the likes of Corsair providing 1GB PC3200 DDR RAM in funky, RD-RAM-esque modules, we thought it was time to return to dual-channel DDR. And with 2GB far cheaper than the RDRAM equivalent - well the choice is a no-brainer.

\$1600 www.altech.com.au



STORAGE AND OPTICAL

Pioneer DVR-A05 Pro

The DVR-A05 Pro is Pioneer's latest all in one optical DVD-R, DVD-RW, CD-R, CD-RW recorder. Why stop at 700MB when you can be copying 9.4GB on Double Sided DVD-R Media?

\$1649 www.ht.com.au



ASUS CRW-5224

Offering 52x read, 52x write and 24x re-write this is currently the fastest CDRW drive around.

\$180 www.techbuy.com.au



Seagate Barracuda ST3120023AS SATA 120GB x2

Thin data cables making your case less cluttered, performance increases over regular ATA100/133, onboard RAID through Gigabyte's GA-8INXP mobo, all combine to make Serial ATA all the rage.

\$726 www.eyo.com.au



Panasonic 3.5" Floppy

Soon optical drives will totally replace the need for the aging 3.5" floppy disk drive, until that time - we best keep one handy

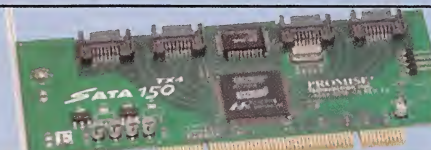
\$25 www.gamedude.com.au



4-Port Serial ATA/150 RAID controller

Sure Ultra wide SCSI is faster, but without a PCI-Express motherboard is greatly underutilised. Can be used as a highly effectively RAID solution.

\$TBA www.adaptec.com (02) 9416 0687



PHYSICALITY AND INPUT

Samsung SyncMaster 240T 24" TFT

Impress your friends with the most beautiful (and expensive) LCD monitor available. This wide screen gem has it all, and then some. Absolute gaming bliss.

\$8300 www.techbuy.com.au



Lian Li Black PC71 case

It's black, oozing with complete style and class and manufactured by Lian Li - what more could you ask for?

\$460 www.pccasegear.com



Logitech Cordless Freedom Optical

No cables means no tangles and looking like it belongs in the lair of a Bond villain - what more could you want for the Beast?

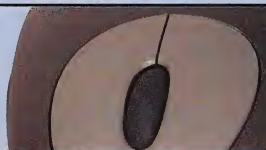
\$250 www.logitech.com (02) 9972 3711



Logitech Cordless Mouse MX700

At 125Hz it's 25 cycles per second faster than a standard corded mouse and the receiver station also doubles as a recharger. An accurate pointing device it's perfect for all forms of gaming. This is certainly the best mouse ever made!

\$189 www.harristechnology.com.au 1 300 139 999



Thrustmaster H.O.T.A.S. Cougar Flight

Modeled on the f-16 flight stick and throttle, the HOTAS Cougar will make you a master of flight sims.

\$600 au.thrustmaster.com (02) 8303 1818



Logitech Momo Force

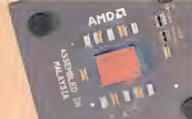
The same wheel found in sports cars around the world available for your PC. Fuzzy dice optional.

\$499 www.logitech.com (02) 9972 3711



the beastie

AMD Athlon 2200+
Enough power for all your beastie needs
\$205



512MB of Kingmax RAM
Rated at DDR333 and 512MB of it you won't have a problem running most games
\$275



Abit NF-7
Supporting Dual DDR400, AGP 8X, USB2.0, ATA133 and SoundStorm technology
\$215



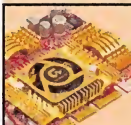
80GB Seagate Barracuda HDD
7200 RPM with plenty of room for all those games you install
\$190



Sony 16X DVD
Not much use having that DVD full of goodness on the cover when you can't look at it
\$75



Gigabyte R9000-Pro 2
With 128MB onboard, twin view, DVI support and more this card is perfect for the beastie
\$225



Hercules Muse XL
Fully EAX 1 and 2 compatible this is the most affordable surround sound solution
\$35



Hyundai F770D 17" CRT
It's big and flat, for gaming in crisp colours
\$260



Black Millennium case
Mid Size case with a clear side Perspex window and 350watt PSU
\$110



TDK Tremor TS-60
Excellent bass and amazing satellite response
\$129



total beastie value: \$1733



TOTAL BEAST VALUE:

APPROX \$24700

SETUP



WRITE TO SETUP AT:

Setup
PC Powerplay
78 Renwick St
Redfern
NSW 2016

setup@pcpowerplay.com.au

LETTER OF THE MONTH: FIREWALLED BY LAPTOP

Q I recently connected to ADSL with a D-Link 500 modem/router. I've set up two computers to connect to the Internet through a hub, but with no luck. Both computers have network cards and network cables and one is a laptop and the other is a desktop. Right now, the only way I can get onto the Net is by plugging a computer straight into the router, which, in this case, is the laptop. When I try to join a game in KALI, I always get the connection timeout screen. When I open up Gamespy Arcade it tells me I have the firewall enabled, but I've checked plenty of times and I don't. I rang up the my ISP and they suspect my computer has a firewall enabled or something. I really want to solve this problem.

Jimmy

A ADSL, eh? Good on'ya mate. I'm almost deaf to dial-up critters now and I just hate talkin' to VCR people. The default rule for most routers is "nothing gets in that hasn't been requested". Any TCP or UDP

packet initiated from another machine on the outside of your network will be dropped by the router. In order to play over the Internet you'll need to set up some port-forwarding (PF), but know that PF may require static IPs and not Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol; PF allows another computer on the Internet to initiate communication with yours for applications like gaming. Also, some applications, especially games, don't work well with NAT, but can be made to work correctly using PF. Given that the laptop works off the router means the DHCP is probably working between those two. The workstation probably doesn't have DHCP enabled, or it has an invalid IP, as it doesn't work off the router or LAN. And lastly, you need to check your RJ-45 cabling. All ports on a DSL-500/504 are MDI-X ports: that is, when connecting to a NIC, use a straight-through (patch) cable or when connecting to a switch/hub, use a patch cable to

the uplink port or a cross-over cable to a normal port. By default, the DSL-500 DHCP server function is enabled, so any PC should be able to obtain an IP automatically if they are setup correctly. In simple terms, the DSL-500 and other bits of kit like it, is PC #1 with a default IP of 192.168.0.1 and subnet mask of 255.255.255.0. While you can assign static IPs to any PC hanging off the network, (like 192.168.0.2 for the laptop), it's smarter and easier to let DHCP do the work. The only setting required in the connected PCs network dialogue is enabled DHCP and there should be nothing else. BUT to configure port forwarding, you'll need to know the port or "service" numbers used by the application you use and the IP Address of the computer running the application. Note, if your PC's IP address changes later, such as after a reboot, the port forwarding will not work. You may want to

assign fixed addresses to PCs that'll host services. For KALI, each computer must use a different port number - checkout http://www.netgear-support.com/ts/doc/port_applications.htm for some tips (yeah, I know it's Netgear but go there anyway). You should also check under NAT Configuration in the router that "NAT Function" is enabled and that "DMZ State" is disabled. Under the "DHCP Configuration On LAN" folder make sure the IP Addresses don't start AND stop with 192.168.0.2. Lastly, set Lease Time to the default value for "never".



MISSING IP

Q I have ADSL with Netspace and a D-Link 504 modem, and I am having trouble finding my IP address. All the basic methods of finding it has resulted in a 192.168.0.1. The strange thing is, I can play and join online games, but I can't host Internet games. When I give gamers the IP, no one sees my game! I've been told it's because Netspace gave me another IP, but checking that, no one else can see the game on that either. Any ideas?

Mish

A You need a fist full of services! Services are functions performed by server computers at the request of client computers. For example, Web servers serve web pages, time servers serve time and date information, file servers serve files (blah, blah - you get the idea) and game hosts serve data about other players' moves. When a computer on the Internet sends a request for service to a server computer, the requested service is

identified by a service or port number. This number appears as the destination port number in the transmitted IP packets. For example, a packet sent with destination port number 80 is an HTTP (Web server) request. So, you need to know your DSL-504 backwards; you need to understand the menu-items when you browse to <http://192.168.0.1>, because your DSL-504 is the first PC on your network with that address. You need to know about UPnP; you need to know about Port Range Forwarding; you need to Google a bit; you need to join a Broadband Forum... You should consider setting up another PC as a Dee Em Zee (DMZ) box or Exposed Host as the CS server. A piece of kit like the Netgear FR114P Firewall/Router comes pre-configured with application support for Quake, Half-Life, StarCraft, Unreal Tournament, CS and others. I'm sure the DSL-504 does, as well.



OUTDATED BIOS

Q I've just recently upgraded my computer with a A7V8X motherboard and an AMD XP 2400+. When I first booted up it went straight to the BIOS and wanted me to specify the MHz. What the...?

Mish

A A mis-identified processor is usually the result of an outdated BIOS. If the reported frequency is incorrect and all motherboard settings are configured correctly (core voltage, bus speed and clock multiplier), the CPU is probably running at the correct speed, but is being mis-identified by the BIOS. An outdated BIOS can also result in the processor's type being identified incorrectly, or being identified as 'unknown' and leap into the BIOS. The latest Overview webpage for the A7V8X trumpets "Socket A for AMD Athlon XP/ Athlon/ Duron up to 2.4GHz+ and Thoroughbred core CPU ready". But, here's the real deal: the

original BIOS Revision will support up to Athlon 1400MHz (266 MHz FSB). You need Revision 1003 (av8x4m03.zip of 15 Aug 2002) to add Athlon XP 1500+ support up to Athlon XP 2200+ inclusive. There're no less than another eight BIOS revisions to add support all the way to a Model-10 Athlon XP 3000+ with 333MHz FSB. But there's a catch, and you've run smack-bang into it! To run an Athlon XP 2400+ (hehe, note that speed) you need BIOS Revision 1004 AND your A7V8X needs to be PCB Revision 1.04... otherwise you're stuck at 2200+. Also, note you can only run a 333MHz FSB CPU if there's a FSB333 sticker on the south bridge. Your A7V8X has the PCB number printed on the board itself and if you've the 1.04 Revision, all you need to do is upgrade the BIOS. By the way, your CPU runs at 2GHz.

UNREAL MODS

Q I have a lot of Unreal Tournament mods, but they're in the form of a UMOD and I can't work out how to open and install them. I've tried searching the web to find a program to install these files, but to no avail. How do I install these files?

Toby Gilmour

A A UMOD installer, or "Unreal Modules", are the Unreal engine's native format for game content distribution and automated installation. A UMOD installer is an uncompressed archive of files stored with information about where those files are to be installed and also necessary INI file changes. You could even create shortcuts or registry entries with UMOD files. Sometimes, when you double-click the .umod file, nothing happens or Explorer asks which program you want to open it with. In this case your .umod file association is most likely broken, which occasionally happens for unfathomable reasons. You can now download a tool UT2K3 Regcheck: v-1.3 and run it for a registry fix - Google will find some links. In UT2003, the UMOD installers have the file extension UT2MOD ("UT 2003 Module"). The installer doesn't work correctly until build 2166, so you need to



patch until your complete that revision. To remove a UMOD file start UT's Setup utility: Run Setup.exe located in the UnrealTournament/System folder. Go to the Install/Uninstall control panel and select "Unreal Tournament". Just select the UMODs you want to remove and click from there.

LESS GHZ

I recently bought a Pentium 4-2.4GHz and ECS MoBo. Would you happen to know why my CPU only runs at 1.8GHz instead of 2.4GHz?

Jared Davey

There are several easy things to look for: Does the motherboard support 2400 MHz or does it need a BIOS upgrade? Has the multiplier for the CPU been manually set at the wrong value? Intel first introduced three P4 chips capable of running on a 533MHz bus (quad-pumped 133MHz). They're clocked at 2.26GHz, 2.4GHz, and 2.53GHz. As there was already a 2.4GHz version of the P4 out there running on a 400MHz bus (quad-pumped 100MHz), the new chip was designated 2.40B. There's really nothing new about these P4 Northwood core processors apart from their clock multipliers. The 2.40 runs at 6x while the 2.40B runs at 4.5x. So, it seems that either your 400MHz FSB CPU has been set to 4.5x instead of 6x, or your 2.40B is running on a quad-pumped 100MHz instead of 133MHz. Does the board support a 533MHz FSB? Hehe, did you build this yourself?!

NEVER WINTER

Q I have installed DirectX9 on my computer and have found out Neverwinter Nights doesn't run anymore, even though just about everyone I know doesn't experience problems running NWN under DX9. Unfortunately, it's been a while and the system restore point I made has been deleted. How do I get rid of DX9? If I run dxdiag, it gives me a list of all DX9 files. Can these be found and deleted? If so, will that remove DX9, so I can install an earlier version? Is it safe for my system if I remove these files?

fluffy_tail

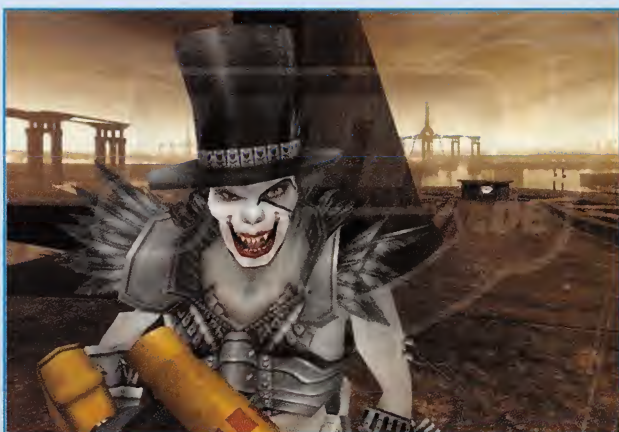
A Bzzzztt! DirectX9 is a system component and can't be uninstalled. Do not delete any of these files. If there's a problem with the installation, it can normally be resolved by shutting down all running applications and reinstalling, rebooting, reinstalling, rebooting... First, give this a go before you hit <format c:/u/s>. WinMe and WinXP users have the "System Restore point" option before installing - you did do this, didn't you?! Oh yeah, "the system restore point I made has been deleted" - bummer. Generally, upgrading to the latest DirectX version, without GOOD reason, deserves a quick blow to the head. Typically, any title using DirectX will install the version of DirectX it requires in order to run. You generally don't need to install DirectX9 in order to get your current programs to run. OK, many game demos don't come with DirectX, so you may need to

install DirectX9 if you plan to play the latest demo.

A user with earlier versions of DirectX may have trouble joining or hosting games, or may see a significant performance reduction when playing with users who have DirectX9 installed. Only 'DirectX9ers' can see each other reliably most of the time on a game network. In this case, I recommend to all users who want to join or host multiplayer games to upgrade to DirectX9. When coupled with a DirectX9 compatible video adaptor and driver, you may see a visual improvement in games designed with DirectX9 in mind, but the cost of these cards can run a small African nation for a few months and most of us can't afford this new technology until it's older technology.

ERROR INSTALL

Q Thank you for being around! Three and a half years ago, I didn't know how to turn a computer on. Today, after subscribing to your brilliant magazine and reading such excellent information from cover to cover, I can now fix most of my PC problems. However, there is one issue still worrying me. I have a problem installing my ASUS GeForce4 TiV8460 Deluxe with WinXP Home on my gaming rig with the WinFast GeForce3 Ti200 I'm trying to upgrade. My problem seems to be with WinXP compatibility issues and starts with the hardware wizard when, after finding the card, I receive error messages. The first are: "Error installing this hardware" and "can't install this driver it has not passed the Windows logo testing to verify it's compatibility with WinXP". I chose to install the driver anyway, and received the message: "Cannot install this hardware there is a problem installing this hardware, Video control (VGA Compatible) an Error occurred during the installation of the device" and "The data is invalid". I'm out of my league with this stuff. I've tried all the nVIDIA drivers, including 41.09, and installed them correctly. I'm broken hearted and would like to know what can I do about this win logo thingy, which is stopping me from achieving great happiness.



Xaero the kitten says: When you download games, you're downloading COMMUNISM!

So let us download the games for you.
PCPowerPlay, there's a soul's worth of
demos free with every issue.



www.pcpowerplay.com.au
(Come to the website to find out more about the demos with
every issue. And about communism.)

I've installed this card on my
Win98 rig with no problems.

Fran

A You're breaking my heart. You must uninstall the adaptor being replaced! This is the advice we gave to Derek not long ago, thanks to a few readers, subscriber Robert Halstead among them:

To fix this problem, go to Start, Run... and type "regedit" without the quotes to run the Registry Editor. Navigate to HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\ENUM\PCI and you'll see a number of keys of the form "VEN_xxxx", where xxxx are strings like "1102&DEV_0004&SUBSYS_0001103&REV_04". Under each of these folders will be another folder with a long numerical name. Open each folder and look for the "DeviceDesc" which matches the hardware you're trying to install. Right Click on the "VEN_xxxx" for that device and select "Permissions" and then tick "Allow" for "Full Control". Close Regedit and then continue with the installation of your device.



Time for a
driver update

However, your Riva needs to come to the party and is no match for a 19 inch monitor - way less than a hundred dollars will get you an MX400 and rates over 80Hz.

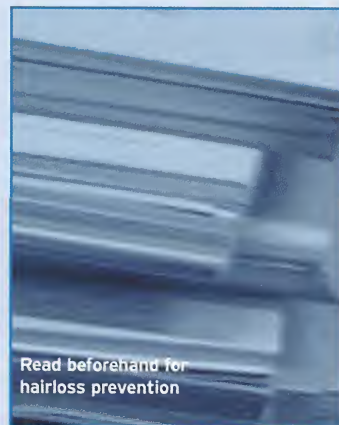
DIRECTCD BOOTS

Mr Calvin, I read the setup letter about dual booting in PCPP#85. I have two hard drives with Win98 on one and WinXP on the other. My DirectCD won't install on the XP drive, so when I want to use them I have to boot off the old hard drive, which I do by changing the boot drive from inside BIOS. Is there some way at boot up I can have the option to choose which OS I want to use?

Shuan Cooper

Mr Calvin, huh? Next we'll have AnthonyF addressing me as "sir!" I can't begin to imagine how you did this except perhaps booting from a different disk to install WinXP! I've sent you some detailed information, but the answer lies in MS Knowledge Base Article 30706 - if you don't understand anything in that article then please get some assistance. What you'll be doing is creating a boot.ini file and adding some other special files on to your c:\ drive. It's not easy and you must print-off all the relevant MS Knowledge Base articles before you start. Most Win9x drive C:\ with XP drive D:\ installs have a boot.ini, when Win9x is default, it looks like this:

```
[Boot Loader]
Timeout=5
Default=C:\
[Operating Systems]
C:\="Microsoft Windows 98"
multi(0)disk(0)rdisk(1)partition(2)\WINDOWS="Microsoft Windows XP Professional" /fastdetect
```



Read beforehand for
hairloss prevention

MONITOR FLICKER

Q Just recently, I noticed my 19 inch Gateway VX900 had a flicker to it. When pressing the On Screen Display, it read "38KHz/60Hz". This is low isn't it? How do I raise the refresh rate? Also, the day before, I had installed nVIDIA's 43.45 drivers for my nVIDIA Riva TNT2. Could this have anything to do with it?

Dario

A My 20 inch LG Studioworks 20i runs at 81.9KHz/101Hz, which is a horizontal refresh rate of about 90KHz and a vertical rate of about 100Hz - and it's an old monitor! Because the horizontal refresh rate is so fast, it's the horizontal Hz rate we should worry about. Anything in the 60s is hurting your brain and anything connected to it like your arse. A decent monitor will provide Horizontal Scanning Frequencies of 30-96KHz, Vertical Scanning Frequencies of 50-160Hz and a Pixel Frequency around 200MHz. You should see a maximum resolution up at 1600x1200 at 75Hz and a range of maximum Flicker-Free resolutions 1280x1024 at 90Hz, 1152x864 at 110Hz and my favourite 1024x768 at 120Hz. At 800x600 you should be staring at 150Hz! In this case, the culprit is the nVIDIA Driver set, which does not reset the screen size and resolution as it damn well should after a driver upgrade. Right-click you desktop, choose Properties, click Settings, then Advanced (or Refresh Frequency in NT4) and go from there.



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self powered satellite speakers and subwoofer

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The Metallic Silver JBL Creature 3 piece speaker system includes two desktop speakers and a subwoofer. Both speakers and the subwoofer are magnetically shielded to provide the greatest protection against image distortion on a computer monitor.

The JBL Creature comes with unique "capacitance touch" volume control buttons on the right satellite.

Both satellites also have down firing green LEDs for a cool desktop look in minimum lighting environments.



COMPATIBILITY:



PC:
All Models



PC Laptop:
All Models



Apple:
All Mac models
equipped w/
headphone jack



Portable Audio:
mp3 players,
discmans and
walkmans equipped
w/headphone jack

SYSTEM:

Input Impedance:
>5K
Signal-to-Noise:
>80dB
Frequency Response:
50 - 20kHz
Input Sensitivity:
400 mv rms for rated power output
Voltage Input:
120VAC

SUBWOOFER:

Drivers:
One 4.00 inch Magnum transducer
Power:
24 watts at 10% (THD+N)
Crossover Frequency:
180Hz
Dimensions:
Width: 9.0 inches Depth: 9.0 inches
Height: 9.0 inches

SATELLITE:

Drivers:
One Odyssey Plus transducer
Power:
8 watts per satellite at 10% (THD+N)
Dimensions:
Width: 3.0 inches Depth: 3.0 inches
Height: 3.0 inches

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VIRUSWATCH

With Stuart and Andrew Calvin

VBS_GROUCH.A

Got Virus? Write to us at
viruswatch@pcpowerplay.com.au for some
 sweet sweet relief...

A nasty little number that is ruining all your relationships

Q Dear Virus Watch,
 My PC is doing really, really strange things. I am running IE6, Outlook Express and XP Pro. Earlier this year, a strange dialogue box popped up on my screen. It said "Happy Birthday Dear" and "You are My Best Friend". I clicked OK and my mouse went haywire. I had to go into mouse properties and swap my mouse buttons around. Then a few days later, a hidden file (I have Show Hidden Files set, so I noticed it - it was slightly greyed-out and blurry) appeared on the desktop named aYerHS.txt. Now this was really weird:

"W32.@YerH\$.B,Made in
 India, wE aRe thE grEaT
 iNdliaNs..
 aBout mE :
 jUst a cOmputEr gEEk..
 i tHiNk i aM sTiLL a sCrIpT
 kiddiE..
 eDuCaTiOn : sChOOl
 sTudEnt..
 aBout @YerH\$.B:
 nO dEstrucTivE paYload\$
 fOr inFecTeD cOmPUteRs.
 teRminAtiOn oF aV +
 FireWaLL fOr sUrviVaL.
 tImE dEfined tRigErRing..
 jUst fOr fUn.. nO paYload.
 cOntAinS bUg iN
 rEpLiCaTiOn cOdE.. no time
 to fIx.
 gOnNa fIx iT iN nExt
 rElEase..
 nO mOrE \$hIT"

What's weirder, is I deleted it, but it reappears every frickin' Thursday and has been for months! Should I change my system date back to Friday every Wednesday? Also, my IE home page changes randomly and sometimes the site can't be found. I'm about to go insane because I have Norton's 2000 Anti Virus installed, but it finds nothing?! I try to bring up Task Manager, but it's not working. What has happened?

Asteroid (Damien)

A Dear Damien,
 Looking at the text file you sent, which is harmless in itself, you have acquired "WORM_YAHA.K". This virus was discovered on 24 December 2002 and a fix developed by just about every AV software vendor the same day. In less than six months over 50,000 PCs have become infected in Australia alone and over a million worldwide. For some reason Germany outstrips every other country for infections by 3:1 at over 150,000 reports. Your own AV software is fine, but you have to pay for the upgrades to keep it working effectively, which I presume you haven't done since you finished a crate of champagne near Lady Macquarie's Chair on Day 1 of the new millennium. Your variant (bearing in mind YOU have been owned) seems to be exhibiting all the payloads:

Displays a message box; Swaps the left and right click mouse functions; Drops a hidden non-malicious text file in the Windows desktop; Hides files and folders in the Personal folder (usually C:\My Documents); Modifies the Internet Explorer home page.

WORM_YAHA is gaining ground on Klez, the most widespread e-mail worm ever. Like Klez, Yaha is a mass-mailing worm that activates when the infected e-mail is rendered in a preview pane or opened for reading. To do this, the worm exploits a vulnerability in Internet Explorer, Outlook, and Outlook Express, which was first acknowledged by Microsoft in March 2002. Yaha is even more aggressive than Klez, sending itself to potential victims gleaned from the infected machine's email databases every few minutes.

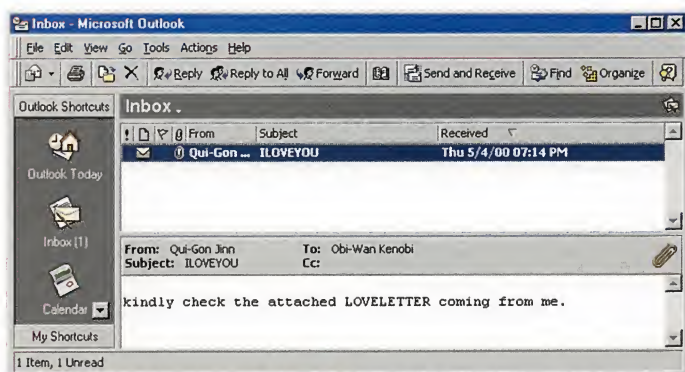
It came from a friend

This memory-resident worm arrives as an attachment in email. The subject lines used by the worm are sufficiently provocative to encourage most recipients to view its messages, triggering the infection. The most common way to catch WORM_YAHA.K is to download (intentionally or accidentally) and activate a screensaver that could be named "love.scr" or another few dozen

TREND MICRO PC-cillin TOP 10

These ones are going around. Keep an eye for them and make sure you're protected:

- 1. WORM_LOVGATE.F**
 Non-destructive Worm: Infects via email attachments. Self-powered mass mailer
- 2. PE_FUNLOVE.4099**
 Non-destructive File Infector: Infects executables and changes their size.
- 3. PE_ELKERN.D**
 Non-destructive File Infector: Infects .EXE and .SCR files and increases their size.
- 4. WORM_KLEZ.H**
 Destructive Worm: Infects via email attachments. Self-powered mass mailer
- 5. PE_NIMDA.A-O**
 Destructive Worm: shares your local drives to compromise the security of your file system.
- 6. WORM_YAHA.G**
 Non Destructive Worm: a mass-mailing worm propagates via email.
- 7. JS_NOCLOSE.E**
 Non-destructive Trojan: non-memory resident JavaScript malware opens and hides one or more Internet browser windows and prevents users from controlling these browser windows.
- 8. WORM_YAHA.K**
 Destructive Worm: Self-powered mail mailer; nuisance value and Internet bandwidth choker
- 9. PE_NIMDA.E**
 Destructive Worm: fast-spreading file infector that arrives via email, as an attachment called SAMPLE.EXE
- 10. PE_PARITE.A**
 Non-destructive File Infector Virus: Infects .EXE and .SCR files and increases their size.



What is a Virus?

A computer virus is a program - a piece of executable code - that has the unique ability to replicate. Like biological viruses, computer viruses can spread quickly and are often difficult to eradicate. They can attach themselves to any type of file and are spread as files that are copied and sent from person to person.

like it, which are most popularly sent via Outlook, MSN, Yahoo and other Instant Messengers. Males, (guys, men, boys - people like you) tend to be infected by enticing file names like "Hardcore4Free.scr", "Hacker.scr" and "xxx4Free.scr" while females tend towards "Beautiful.scr" and "Valentines_Day.scr". Please don't think I'm sexist, I just report the facts! Several years ago, most viruses spread primarily via floppy disk, but the Internet has introduced new virus distribution mechanisms. With email now used as an essential business communication tool, viruses are spreading faster than ever. Viruses attached to email messages can infect an entire enterprise in a matter of minutes.

What does it do??

Once activated, Yaha disables anti-virus and firewall programs and begins to propagate. Upon execution, it drops copies of itself as the following:

```
%System%\NAV32_LOADER.EXE
%System%\TCPSV32.EXE
%System%\WINSERVICES.EXE
where %System% is the Windows
system folder, which is usually
C:\Windows\System on Win9x and
WinMe, C:\WINNT\System32 on
WinNT and Win2K, or
C:\Windows\System32 on WinXP. It's
no coincidence that the worm has
'official-looking' names and relies on
this inconspicuous nature to remain
undetected by causal inspection in
Explorer or other file utility. The
malware may also drop any file, which
is randomly selected from the
following list, in the Windows System
folder:
```

```
hotmail_hack.exe
friendship.scr
world_of_friendship.scr
shake.scr
Sweet.scr
Be_Happy.scr
Friend_Finder.exe
```

```
I_Like_You.scr
love.scr, dance.scr
GC_Messenger.exe
True_Love.scr
Friend_Happy.scr
Best_Friend.scr
life.scr
colour_of_life.scr
friendship_funny.scr
funny.scr.
```

This worm propagates via email using its own SMTP engine. It connects to IP address 12.127.17.71 to send email. It retrieves the recipient addresses from

Windows Address Book (WAB), Yahoo Messenger, MSN and .NET Messenger Services and files with extensions containing the string "HT".

The malware may use the current user name in the FROM field or it may spoof this field, depending on system time. This worm also launches a Denial of Service attack against a particular site (in Pakistan) and terminates the Task Manager, in memory, so it can't be run, under WinNT, Win2K, and XP. It runs on Win9x, NT, Win2K, WinMe, and WinXP. You may have changed the location of C:\My Documents to another folder (or even deleted it) since you haven't noticed this particular payload.

Antivirus Software Retaliation

The worm also attempts to terminate popular antivirus software processes in memory including:

```
AVP32
MCAFEES
NORTON
NVC95
FP-WIN
F-PROT95
F-STOPW
NMAIN
NAVW32
NAVAPW32
VSSTAT
WEBTRAP
POP3TRAP
PCCMAIN
PCCIOMON
```

What's the antidote?

Like most viruses, the best way to fix it is to not get it. After installing anti-virus software, check for pattern file updates every day. If you can schedule update checks daily, make sure you do it. Most online and large organisations check for new patterns and engines every hour. But if you do

What is Malware?

Malware - short for malicious software - refers to any malicious or unexpected program or code, such as viruses, Trojans, and droppers. Not all malicious programs or codes are viruses. The other major types of malware are Trojans, droppers and kits. Due to the many facets of malicious code or a malicious program, referring to it as malware helps to avoid confusion. A virus that also has Trojan-like capabilities can be called malware.

get infected, what can you do? Most of the anti-virus vendors offer detailed instructions and even downloads from their web sites to clean PCs. If you're game or don't have access to an anti-virus program you can edit the Windows Registry, which I will later describe in more detail.

The Malware Program

This procedure terminates the running malware process from memory on Windows 9x/ME systems only. You will need the name(s) of the file(s) detected earlier. Open Windows Task Manager. Press the CTRL+ALT+DELETE keys.

In the list of running programs, locate the malware file or files. Select one of the detected files, then press the End Task button. Do the same for all detected malware files in the list of running processes. To check if the malware process has been terminated, close Task Manager, and then open it again. Close Task Manager.

Note: On systems running Windows NT/2000/XP, Task Manager is terminated by the malware. To effectively terminate the malware process(es), you may use a third party process viewer similar to "Process Explorer" provided by Sysinternals.

Mouse Configuration

The malware swaps the functions of the left and right mouse buttons as a payload. Follow these instructions to reset your mouse configuration. Open Control Panel. Click

Start>Settings>Control Panel. Select Mouse, then press Enter. In the Buttons Tab, pick either Right-handed or Left-handed depending on your original configuration. Click OK. Close Control Panel.

Registry Shell Spawning

Registry shell spawning executes the malware when a user tries to run an .EXE file. The following procedures

What is a Trojan?

A malware that performs unexpected and malicious actions. The difference between a Trojan and a virus is the inability to replicate. Trojans cause unexpected system behaviour and compromise the security of systems, but do not replicate. A Trojan typically comes in good packaging, but has hidden malicious intent within its code.

should restore the registry to its original settings. Click Start>Run.

In the Open input box, type: command /c copy %WinDir%\regedit.exe regedit.com | regedit.com

Press Enter. In the left panel, double-click the following:

HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT>exefile>shell

>open>command

In the right panel, locate the registry entry: Default

Check whether its value is the path and filename of the malware file. If the value is the malware file, right-click Default and select Modify to change its value. In the Value data input box, delete the existing value and type the default value: "%1" %*

Close Registry Editor. Click

Start>Run, then type: command /c del regedit.com and Press Enter.

The Registry

Removing Autostart entries from the registry prevents the malware from executing during startup.

Open Registry Editor again. To do this, click Start>Run, type REGEDIT, then press Enter. In the left panel, double-click the following:

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE>Software>Microsoft>Windows>CurrentVersion>Run

In the right panel, locate and delete the entry or entries:

"WinServices" =

%System%\WinServices.exe

In the left panel, double-click the following:

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE>Software>Microsoft>Windows>CurrentVersion>RunServices

In the right panel, locate and delete the entry or entries:

"WinServices" =

%System%\WinServices.exe

Close Registry Editor.

Note: %System% is the Windows system folder, which is usually

C:\Windows\System on Windows 9x

and ME, C:\WINNT\System32 on

Windows NT and 2000, or

C:\Windows\System32 on WinXP.

To Unhide Personal Folder

Enable Show All Files: Open Windows Explorer. Right-click Start then click Explore. Enable the Show All Files option: On Windows 9x/NT: On the View menu, click Options or Folders Options. Click the View tab. Select "Show all files," then click OK.

On Windows 2000/ME/XP: On the Tools menu, click Folder Options. Click the View tab. Select "Show hidden files and folders," then click OK. In Windows Explorer, access your usual personal folder, which should be visible by now. The personal folder is usually C:\My Documents. Right-click the folder and click properties. In the Attributes section, uncheck Hidden and click OK. On Windows 9x/NT, repeat the process for all files and folder inside your personal folder.

On Windows ME/2000/XP, select to Apply changes to this folder, subfolder and files. Close Windows Explorer.

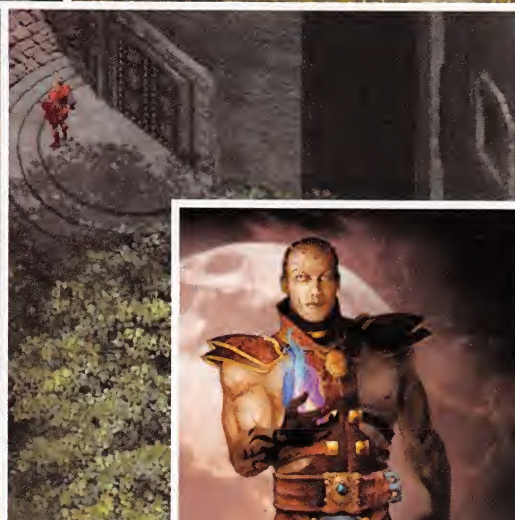
MOD OF THE MONTH: Dragonlance FOR BALDUR'S GATE: SHADOWS OF AMN

Finding a TC mod in development that's not a first person shooter is something of a rarity. They exist, but there doesn't seem to be too many of them around. Finding a TC RPG mod is even rarer, especially one for the Infinity Engine, an engine notoriously difficult to work with. Be that as it may, the good folks from Team BG are at it again with a Baldur's Gate: Shadows of Amn total conversion based around the Dragonlance books. Team BG seem to be the only Infinity Engine modders around, but if their past work is anything to go by (The Darkest Day, Dark Side of the Sword Coast and Epic Endeavours - all of which have made appearances in these pages in the past) then Dragonlance will be a mod well worth waiting for.

The mod is set before the cataclysm that destroys Krynn and brings to life an ancient civilisation at the height of its culture. Although the world is clearly delineated into good and evil, the main character of the story treads a fine line between the two factions and must decide which path he will walk. For the moment, Team BG are keeping pretty tight-lipped as to what is in store for players, but you can rest assured some big old dragons will be making an appearance. None of the characters from the books look like they will feature, but we wouldn't be at all surprised if some of the more ancient and powerful personalities (Fizban?) show up at some time during the tale.

Aside from changing the setting of the game, Team BG are doing a major rules overhaul to make the game feel new rather than an add-on for Baldur's Gate. Instead of sticking with the second edition AD&D rules used in Baldur's Gate, Team BG are opting to update the game to a version of the third edition rules. Players will now have access to special abilities and feats to help them tailor the characters to their liking. Players will also be able to choose from a variety of sub-races at the time of character creation so they won't have to settle with playing a plain old dwarf or elf. All or the favourites from the novels will be available, for instance, hill and mountain dwarves, Qualinesti, Silvanesti and Kagonesti elves. Unfortunately, this also means players will be able to play Kender characters. Team BG is also planning on beefing up the combat engine and adding a handful of special attacks including the ability to disarm opponents.

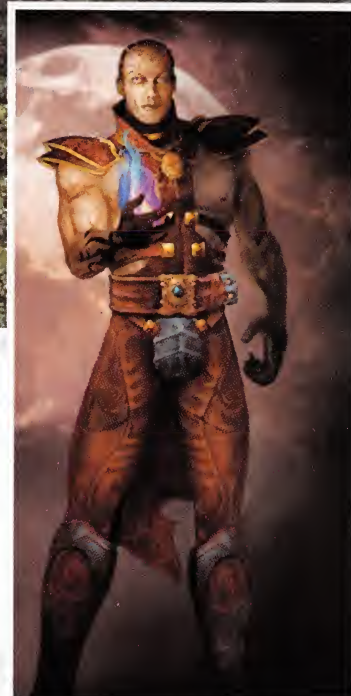
The most substantial rules change in Dragonlance will be the vastly revamped magic system. Team BG are currently developing a points based system in which mages are



allotted a certain amount of spell points per level with which to cast spells each day. Each spell that the mage has in their book is assigned a numerical value, which means mage characters will now have the ability to choose spells on the fly and, therefore, be a good deal more versatile. Another inclusion from the novels requires the mages to choose the white moon (good), black moon (evil) or the red moon (neutral) to follow. When casting a spell, the alignment of the spell will be checked

against the moon of the mage to determine the final price. To make things more complex, Team BG is also considering whether they should include the alignment of the moon in the sky as part of the equation.

If Team BG's track record is anything to go by, then Dragonlance should truly be something special. The team has yet to set a date, but they are currently doing internal beta testing, so we should be able to see a final product within the next few months. Stay tuned.



HALF-LIFE: Battlegrounds

For: Half-Life ■ Version: 1.1 ■ Size: 63.4MB ■ Rating: 4/5

With the sheer proliferation of realistic combat mods floating around on the Internet at the moment it's nice to occasionally see something novel. There's only so many times you can trot out those hoary terrorists vs. counter-terrorists or WW2 chestnuts before it gets dull. Battlegrounds is a breath of fresh air in an otherwise stale genre - a realistic American Revolutionary war mod, complete with all the trimmings and a range of period weaponry including black powder rifles (muskets) cannons, sabres and tomahawks.

Aside from the weapon skins looking great they're really fun to use because much like their real life counterparts, the guns in Battlegrounds are very powerful and almost entirely inaccurate - there's a reason why soldiers formed up in ranks to fire the damn things, they wanted to put as much lead into the air to guarantee that at least someone got hurt. The inaccuracy of the weapons means that most of the combat takes place at close quarters, really testing your twitch and melee combat skills.

Unfortunately, the maps don't live up to the excellence of the rest of the mod. They're not terrible by any

stretch, but they do lack tactical depth. With any luck in later versions, this problem would be overcome. As it stands, it's pretty hard to find a server for Battlegrounds, so unless you have a broadband connection you may have some serious ping problems with online play. If that's the case, Battlegrounds is excellent LAN material for your next party.



Half-Life 2

Valve has made it known they are planning on making Half-Life 2 even more mod friendly than the original game. The most recent details available for the game have slated it for release some time around the end of September. We don't know how reliable this news is, but with any luck we should be seeing code at E3 and a final version of the game by Christmas. If Half-Life 2 is as mod friendly as Valve wants, then we should be seeing wave upon wave of new and refurbished mods by early 2004.

MORROWIND: Giants

For: Morrowind Tribunal ■ Version: 2.0 ■ Size: 30.7MB ■ Rating: 4/5

First thing's first - Morrowind isn't exactly lacking in the monster department - there are quite a few nasties running around for you to sink your teeth into, but like any other RPGs, sometimes you're after a little bit more variety for your kills. Unlike the majority of currently available Morrowind plugins, Giants goes beyond simply add some new monster skins, weapons or the odd shopkeeper with a hell of a lot of money to spend. It delivers a staggering 80 new monsters as well as assorted other goodies. New monsters include a host of undead

including liches, new skeletons, mummies and free roaming vampires, as well as nymphs (featuring some full frontal nudity), pack hunting animals and the giants in this title's namesake.

The game has also been tweaked to make it a little more challenging. Night is no longer simply dark and becomes much more dangerous than day with increased random encounters. Also, the denizens of the night are much tougher than their daytime counterparts and vampires are a thing to be feared.

To make the mod even cooler,

there are more animations for monster deaths, however, if you have the Tribunal extension installed you're in for the greatest addition. Giants for Tribunal has added realistic blood sprays from wounds, as well as dismemberment script for certain monsters. As soon as you see a dead skeleton crumple into a pile of dusty old bones you'll never want to turn back.



QUAKE 3 ARENA: Midget Wars

For: Quake 3 Arena ■ Version: Beta 1 ■ Size: 64MB ■ Rating: 4/5

Cel shading looks set to be the lens flare of the noughties, that is, the nifty graphical effect developers overuse to make themselves look special. So far little cel shading has appeared on PC (Dragon's Lair 3D being one of the few examples), but we don't doubt you'll be seeing a lot more in the immediate future.

Midget Wars, a new(ish) mod for Quake 3 utilises the cel shading effect to great advantage to bring to life a fantastically frenetic little mod in which players take the roles of minuscule warriors battling it out in various backyard and household locales. Life as a 10 inch tall warrior is not as easy as it may sound - aside from being so small you get lost pretty easily, you're also weak, so can only carry a few things at once - no hoarding weapons here.

The biggest facet of gameplay setting Midget Wars from other mods is the addition of the leaf, a piece of equipment with two handy uses. Whilst on the ground your Midget can use the leaf as a shield to effectively render the player invulnerable from front arc attacks. The second use is far more fun. By jumping off a high platform,

Midgets can use the leaf to glide over great distances allowing them to access hard to reach areas and opening up the Y-axis for a whole lot of tactical combat. Though still at a beta stage, Midget Wars is very polished and should really take of in the next few months.



BATTLEFIELD 1942: Merciless

For: Battlefield 1942 ■ Version: 3.7 ■ Size: 34MB ■ Rating: 4/5

Like Battlefield 1942, but crave a little more realism in your WW2 themed carnage? If you answered yes to the question above, then this is the mod for you. Even if you don't want any more realism you should still take a gander. Why? Blood. Merciless for Battlefield 1942 is probably the most advanced blood FX engine mod released. There's a certain satisfaction to be had gunning down the Hun and seeing the crimson rivers flow. OK - so blood isn't the only thing added with the Merciless mod pack, but it's certainly the most showy.

The pack also includes around 20

custom crosshairs and new textures for a number of maps to make them look a little smoother. The problems inherent with most crosshair add-ons is the vast majority either look terrible or take up way too much valuable screen real estate - not so here - each crosshair is nicely understated and realistic.

The new texture packs also look a treat and really beef up the already fairly impressive visuals of Battlefield 1942. The real treat with the new textures are the addition of historically accurate flags for bases and capture points and a slew of custom load screens. Whilst the load screens don't

effect gameplay in any way, they really add a huge amount to overall flavour as they contain archival news articles and propaganda posters. Whilst the Merciless mod pack doesn't change gameplay a great deal, it does a great job of enhancing an already fantastic game. Load it up, you won't be sorry.



DOD Goes Gold

Activision have just announced the retail version of the popular WW2 mod, Day of Defeat, should be appearing on Australian shelves around the time you're reading this. Day of Defeat is only the second ever fan created mod (the first of course being Counter-Strike) to be commercially released by a distributor. If this trend continues, it bodes well for future mods - no one is going to rush out a bit of work when the eyes of major developers could be looking their way.



MODLIFE: Interview

In the upcoming months, we will be interviewing some of the more high profile mod development teams to find out how they went about creating their classic mods, their motivations and any upcoming plans. This month, however, we decided to aim a little closer to home and speak to David Wildgoose and Daniel Staines, editors of PCPP and GBA World, respectively, about their first Deus Ex mod project, why it eventually petered out and whether they have any plans for future mods.



David: It was called the Madam Chairman Project - named after the central AI badguy. How far did we get? We had an extensive design document (about 3000 words) in which we mapped out the events in pretty much the entire game. Roughly - it got a little hazy towards the end (laughs).

In the end, we got one map up and running, fully playable. The map was fully finished. There were lots and lots of lots of conversation. There was no combat in the first part of the game - you could shoot innocent people - or you could go and hunt the cat.

I guess due to dwindling resources - human resources - it never really received the attention and dedication it needed and the project ground to a halt.

To begin with, there were eight people in the team, but by the end, the very bitter end, there was only one person working on the project, Daniel (Staines). I guess for the last few months of the project there were maybe three of us working on it, with the rest of the team basically working as consultants.

It basically died in the arse. Not enough time and not enough resources in the end. And I went back to full time work.

Daniel: There was a period for six months between the end of the last mod and the beginning of the new one when David just kind of showed up one day and said, "would you like to do a Deus Ex mod, again?"

There was a segue between the first and the second. For the second one we decided we wanted to keep it small and focussed, so there are only three members of the team, the two of us as well as March (Stepnik). March and David do the mapping and I am working on the scripting. This time around, we wanted to do something that wasn't associated with Deus Ex, so the mod has a series of missions set in

it's own world and it's own setting.

Modlife: So how is the planning coming along?

David: The planning is almost done - the plan is a lot clearer and more coherent than the first one. We have most of a map done. It's a lot smaller and more tightly controlled than the first mod. There are four main locations and two smaller ones. A lot of the conversations for the first area are already done.

Modlife: So, when should we expect to play it?

Daniel: When it gets finished really.

Modlife: Can you give us more details about the mod?

David: It's kind of a survival horror meets Deus Ex thing. There's been a bit of debate as to how much of the Deus Ex stuff we should use, like skills, augmentations, weapons and tools. We've decided not to have augmentations and to limit the number of weapons available to give it more of a survival horror feel. Minimal skill advancement and combat. Essentially, it's kind of like Planescape: Torment meets Silent Hill all stuck into the Deus Ex engine. I guess that really won't surprise the readers (laughs).



GARAGE GAMES

Into the unknown with George Soropos



LIVE FOR SPEED

URL: [HTTP://LFS.RACESIMCENTRAL.COM/](http://lfs.racesimcentral.com/)

Modern life seems to be all about variety doesn't it? Try to find some plain tuna at your local Woolworths and you have to dig it out from behind the tuna 'in organic goat oil' or 'with chives, dandruff and lawn clippings' or those little packets with a few stale bikkies and some yellow tiling grout. However, when you head over to the games department what do you find? Plain tuna everywhere. These days publishers don't want to take many risks with such big investments and are playing it safe like never before. Bad news? Well, it is for them because while they bury themselves in the mire of mass market appeal, independent developers are filling in the gaping holes the big boys leave behind.

One of those gaps has of late spread to the racing genre. Racing games have not been big sellers since consoles came to dominate the market and leaving PC gamers to chew on aging titles like Grand Prix Legends, Need For Speed and TOCA2. There is a new racing title out, Live For Speed, which is mainly aimed at online play and looks set to take

independent games development into new territory.

The game has been in development for three years and is the product of three hard working people: Scawen Roberts, Eric Bailey and Victor van Vlaardingen. Roberts and Bailey are both former drones from Lionhead Studios and have done most of the code work while Vlaardingen has been working on the audio. LFS has been built as a street racer a la Need For Speed, however, the feel and physics modeling are far superior to anything in EA's long running series.

The Live For Speed demo already boasts great online support and some lovely car handling with more improvements to come. Circuit backgrounds look superb and the car models are attractive as well, with nice lighting touches and transparent windows revealing the inside of your opponent's vehicles.

It's in the feel of the cars that any racing title lives or dies and, here, LFS shines brilliantly. Ultra purists may be disappointed the physics aren't quite as realistic as Grand Prix Legends, but this is a title made for

fast, close and fun online racing, and the demo already delivers! As a regular part of Garage Games, we'll be talking to the developers of each title to get a more personal view of the game and the people behind it.

PCPP: The feel of the cars in LFS is superb, how many different physical forces have been modeled and what are they? (ie tyre to road friction, side roll, etc.)

Vlaardingen: "If you press F when driving in LFS you can see some of the forces working. However, it's not just road-to-tyre friction forces working. For example, tyres flex, which is not just an animation, but simulated and included in calculations."

PCPP: Do any of you have real racing experience? If so, how does it help, and if not, how do you get a feel for the authenticity of your game?

Vlaardingen: "Eric has a love for turbos and knows how to handle them quite well on the road. Scawen has spent a lot of time on the road as a courier! We've produced a car for the FSAE McGill racing team (<http://www.fsaemcgill.ca/english/ca>

[rdesign1.html](#)) and provided them with a special version of the game including an autocross editor to place cones and tire stacks to create courses with. This may lead to interesting feedback from their side and improve the LFS-physics engine."

PCPP: Why did you choose to sell the game yourselves instead of through a publisher?

Vlaardingen: "If one thinks about it for a while, a publisher's main goal is to take care of distribution, promotion and earn money. If we can take care of the first 2 subjects using the 'Net somehow, that would give us the third!"

PCPP: How many different vehicles and tracks will be available in the finished game and will it be easy for gamers to add new ones?

Vlaardingen: "There will be plenty. It may not be in the hundreds though. Firstly, we like variety. Therefore, for the first stages we may want to try out a variety of types of cars. Near the end of the whole LFS project, our editors will most likely become available. By that time, they will be matured and we can make them more user friendly as well."

PCPP: Will you be hosting any kind of game matching service for players or relying on third party software like Gamespy?

Vlaardingen: "We will be making our own integrated master systems. The host screen as you know it will completely turn into a big search/charts/chat engine. Automatic logging of world records, tracking, host stats, racer stats, etc. "Already many people are working on scripts for IRC to track buddies and web based host-logging."





FLASHBACK

Games and tech remembered with Anthony Fordham

THE 7TH GUEST

Developer: Trilobyte
Genre: Silliwod Puzzler
Graphics Mode: SVGA, 256 colours, 640x480, VESA graphics adaptor
Sound: 8 bit digital effects and speech, CD music
True 3D: No - pre-rendered scene transitions with FMV overlay
Operating System: DOS 5.0
Released: 1993

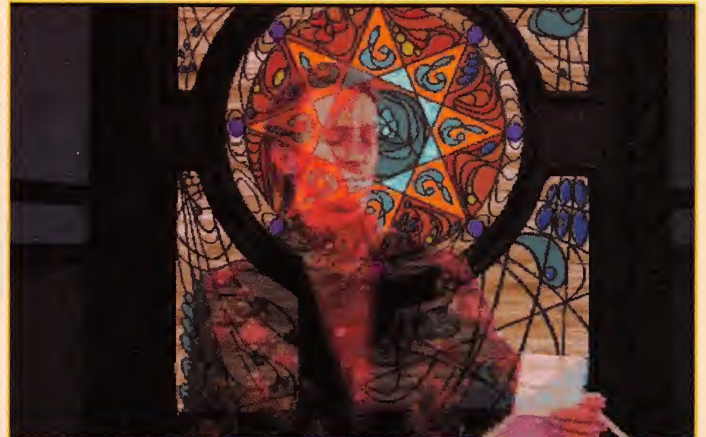
This was the first game I ever bought where having a 2MB graphics adaptor really came in handy. Ah, sweet Western Digital onboard graphics, was there anything finer? The 7th Guest was the first Silliwod game I ever encountered, and what's more, the first game I ever saw that came on two CDs.

In best classical horror tradition, an insane toymaker named Stauf invites a bunch of seemingly unconnected people to spend the night in his house with the promise of riches offered to whoever manages to make it through alive. The player is a disembodied spirit, occupying the house some time after the eventful night of murder and old fashioned mayhem. The ghosts of the six guests are doomed to endlessly

play out their final hours over and over with the player watching them. The aim of the game? To discover the identity of the seventh guest.

Okay, so Guest was basically a series of logic puzzles strung together with bits of FMV. By rights it should have been awful. Some of the puzzles were little more than simple mathematical hopscotch games, spelling out mysterious messages on bedspreads. Others were familiar - place as many Queens on a chessboard as you can so none can capture any other. Even Otello was there, played out by horrible gooey germs under a microscope.

But Guest transcended its content through its presentation, and proved that atmosphere alone can carry a



game. The interior of the house was all done in pre-rendered silicon graphics 3D, but unlike Myst (Flashback#87) which actually post-dates Guest, the transitions between locations were all beautifully animated, giving you a simulated 3D experience that had a level of detail similar to the Quake 3

engine. Of course, the transitions were the same every time, but with a little bit of cheating you actually felt like you were there, in the house.

Incidentally, I first heard of The 7th Guest by reading the Virgin games catalogue that came with my copy of Dune 2. So there you go.

WHY THE 7TH GUEST DESERVES TO BE REMEMBERED

- Awesome haunted house atmosphere
- Made simple puzzling surprisingly immersive
- Clever use of FMV circumvented technological limitations
- First game on two CDs!

FLASHBACK TECH

ASUS 3400TNT

Manufacturer: ASUS
Significance: First nVIDIA Riva TNT-based videocard reviewed by PCPP, offered the first realistic alternative to 3Dfx's Voodoo range of cards
Cost: \$425
Released: 1999

Once upon a time there was a world without 3D accelerators. Shortly thereafter, there was a world full of 3D accelerators, most of them manufactured by a now-defunct company called 3Dfx. If you've ever heard your friends reminiscing about the good ol' Voodoo2, then you know they were part of the 3D revolution.

A 3D accelerator was not a stand-alone card, it was still necessary to have a standard VGA card installed. The 3D accelerator would hang, leech like, off the main video adaptor and handle all

the not-very-complicated-by-today's-standards 3D work. In the late nineties, most 3D accelerators were Voodoo2s, a \$200 card that had the unique ability to work in SLI mode - if you owned two Voodoo2s, you could install them both at once and run twice as fast. It was like a really, really primitive version of today's dual-pipeline cards.

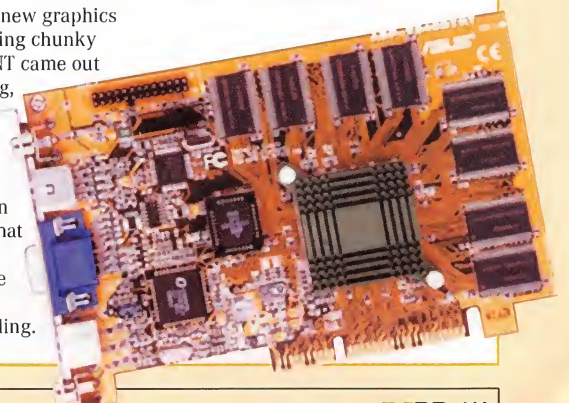
In the middle of this, tiny upstart company nVIDIA thought it had a rendering methodology that could effectively compete with 3Dfx's market dominance. Enter the Riva TNT, old crusty

antecedent of the GeForceFX, believe it or not. The TNT's real claim to fame was its support for 32bit colour, something we now take for granted. At the end of the day, it would be the Voodoo3's lack of 32bit support that would eventually begin the long decline for 3Dfx, while nVIDIA went from strength to strength.

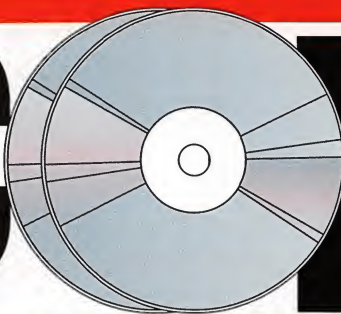
ASUS in the old days was much like ASUS today - producing quality implementations of new graphics technology and getting chunky results. The 3400TNT came out with all guns blazing, easily beating a single Voodoo2 in 3D performance, offering a higher maximum resolution of 1600x1200 (not that any CPU of the day could handle a game at this res) and software DVD decoding.

In our review in PCPP#33 we even speculated on the possibility of using the 3400TNT and a fiendishly expensive DVD-ROM drive as a desktop DVD unit, after all many video stores were starting to think about stocking DVDs as well as VHS. Ah, the 20th Century, how quaint.

We were also really impressed that the 3400TNT had its own cooling fan. Nowadays we wish the GeForceFX didn't.



THE DISC



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We welcome requests so please forward your requests to Disc Producer Paul Noone via email at cdgod@next.com.au or write to PCPP DVD Requests, 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016

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I wonder how many of you noticed that last month's editorial wasn't, in fact, present on the DVD. To those who did - congrats! To the rest of you...well, you know. Anyway, enough on that topic and on to what we've got on this month's mega disc. It's BIG!

MMORPG fans should be pleased with the free trial of Asheron's Call, plus there's a nice little retro freebie for you to celebrate the imminent release of Lure of the Temptress 3. This month's trailers includes

the new Anachronox episode and the third Animatrix (finally!), plus a whole host of other great clips. Check out the CryEngine exploits featuring Far Cry. Where? It's all in this month's Spotlight.

I've also managed to put together a motley selection in Demos. You'll find the good (Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory), the bad (Postal 2), and the downright ugly (you'll work it out, believe me). Other notables, of course, are the new Indy adventure, NOLF 2 multiplayer and here for the first time, Myth 3: The Wolf Age.

The Mods Plus section includes the long-awaited Desert Combat 3 mod, as well as Desert Crisis, the new Firearms, some sweet editing tools and the re-introduction of Daniel Wilks' ModLife... plus more. It's freakin' huge!

But don't think that's all cos there's a lot more goodness to be found in the Bunker, Patches and Utilities. More great files than you can fire a BFG at. I shot you not. Get it into ya!

Paul Noone
Disc Master
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FREE TRIAL!

The mating ritual begins

In Asheron's Call you'll find yourself called by the sorcerer Asheron to participate in epic, massively multiplayer online role-playing adventures in a land called Dereth.

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For help with the trial version please see visit this link on Microsoft's web site:
<http://microsoftgamesinsider.com/AC2/freetrial.htm>



LURE OF THE TEMPTRESS

FREE GAME!

Hmm..tempting.

From Revolution's development game the Virtual Theatre engine. VT allowed in-game characters to wander around the gameworld independently of each other, living their own lives and doing their own thing. Another feature allowed the player to give direct orders to Helper characters - in this case Ratpouch - who would then go off to perform the task. These technology concepts were certainly unique, though Revolution was not sure how to develop them further in subsequent games. Nonetheless, the result was an entertaining adventure game that kicked off Revolution's fondness for characterisation and in-game humour.



ASHERON'S CALL 2

CW: ENEMY TERRITORY

Safer than snowboarding and more fun

In this MP demo Axis and Allied teams do battle in traditional single scenarios or wage war through a series of linked scenarios in a totally new campaign mode. During combat, players gain experience and skill, and through battlefield promotions are awarded additional abilities that remain persistent across an entire campaign. Additionally, new character classes allow teams to perform reconnaissance, steal enemy uniforms, and construct battlefield structures in the midst of combat.



INDIANA JONES AND THE EMPORER'S TOMB

The whip is mightier than the sword... not.

Join daring archeologist and adventurer Indiana Jones as he travels to 1935 China to prevent a powerful artifact from falling into evil hands. Indy's latest adventure takes you from the jungles of Ceylon to the deadly streets of Hong Kong and beyond. Racing against evil Nazis with mysterious, alluring partner Mei Ying, you'll leap, swim, climb and punch your way through exotic locales, fighting hand-to-hand combat!

It will take more than just your trusty whip and pistol to avoid deadly traps and navigate through all the dangerous environments. Do you have what it takes to possess the mysterious "Heart of the Dragon?"



FIGHTER ACE

Version 3.5 that is!

Welcome to the world of Fighter Ace™, a real 3D massively multiplayer aerial combat game. Strap yourself into the cockpit of any one of over 95 World War II vintage fighters and bombers before taking to the skies against up to 200 virtual pilots in one single air combat arena.

Watch your six as you join in the most notorious battles in history as an Ally or an Axis Power. Bombard targets on the ground or take down your enemies in the air.



LIVE FOR SPEED

Quite a fun little racing sim

Live For Speed is a very good touring car racing simulation. Graphics and sound are great, and there is a real sense of speed when driving the vehicles and Force Feedback gives very good inputs. Very good car physics and wait until you get on dirt! There is a wide range of skill level adjustments and a good assortment of vehicle adjustments.

The game was developed by only three guys and this is their first foray into game development. Very promising, I say. The demo offers four different tracks and multiplayer support. You should find this very enjoyable.

MYTH 3: THE WOLF AGE

Ah, nothing beats a good old pagan ritual

Myth 3: The Wolf Age takes place 1000 years before the first two Myth games. This prequel is a fully 3D squad-based Real Time Strategy (RTS) fantasy game that follows the life of Connacht the Wolf.

Set in 1421 AE, Myth 3: The Wolf Age opens with the world in chaos. Most of humanity has been scattered for centuries. To defeat your enemies, you must cast spells, gain experience, collect items, and build ancient devices.

This is a demo that features the game play fixes and enhancements done by MythDevelopers. These include over 40 game play fixes and enhancements including multiplayer using the PlayMyth.net game server.



STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE 2 (SP)

Next time: a bigger gun

A terrifying evil has awakened. Hordes of nightmarish creatures are attacking ships and colonies throughout the galaxy. Evolved for combat, their armies have made easy work of the opposition. Now, it's up to the Hazard Team to respond. Lead your highly trained squad from volcanic worlds to deadly swamps, from starship hulls to the underground cities of long-vanished races, from mercenary space stations to ice planets.



POSTAL 2

Some people are just born to lose

Forget what you know about first person shooters. Walk a week in the Postal Dude's shoes. Freely explore full 3-D open ended environments. Interact with over 100 unique NPCs including Gary Coleman, marching bands, dogs, cats and elephants, protesters, policemen and civilians, with or without weapons. POSTAL 2 is all about choice; experiment with everyone and everything.



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2 (MP)

To market, to market to buy a fat...

The villains of H.A.R.M. are back with only one obstacle to thwart their quest for global domination: Cate Archer, the daring super spy who foiled their last nefarious plot.

They've summoned the world's deadliest assassins to take her out of the spy trade once and for all. Meanwhile, the United States has uncovered a top secret Soviet project that could bring about World War III. Can Cate avert a nuclear holocaust and simultaneously keep herself out of H.A.R.M.'s Way?



WW2: FRONTLINE COMMAND

Nothing razes a town quite like a tank.

This one is set to capture the most significant battles. As Commander of the Allied Forces, the game will see players attempting to drive the Axis forces deep back inside their own territory. With a full range of authentic troops and equipment, players become a master of the battlefield to ensure final victory.



DISC VIRUS SCANNING

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Yellow Boots

Love is Not a Four Letter Word

When games are your reality, love needs a new manual

What do I know about love? Recent mounting correspondence to various of my supposedly secret email addresses from what can only be described as 'frustrated' Boots fans has uniformly requested that I dedicate at least one column to the pursuit of couplehood. It would appear that many Boots readers seem to think that having a girlfriend will somehow magically enhance their ability to operate in normal society and decrease their reliance on, shall we say, digital avenues of release.

I can only suppose that these recent demands are a direct result of my constant reference to The Girl with whom I once lived in a basement apartment, and The Relationship that we both enjoyed together, although enjoyed may be considered a bit of a strong word.

Okay, so here's what I know about love: love is like a Quake 3 deathmatch against Xaero on Nightmare skill level in Q3DM17, where he has a railgun with infinite ammo and you have the gauntlet, and no mouse. Love is about getting railed over and over and over again, finding yourself repeatedly 'in the wrong place' and of course 'trying to invade Xaero's personal space.' It is a constant stream of 'Humiliation!' while Xaero is 'Excellent' and 'Impressive'. It's an arena where even if you do manage to score one or even two hits, you will be immediately and repeatedly slammed. There's no fraglimit, no timelimit and the game only ends when one of you gets bored and quits the server. And you can guess who that usually is.

But I'm racing ahead of myself; first you have to GET a girlfriend. The railing and the Humiliation! comes later.

Girls, see, have two lives. They have their normal life where they get up, eat breakfast, go off and do some work or study, come home, watch Friends, call their own friends to discuss

Rachael's hair, go to bed, and repeat. Then there is their other life, the life where they all compete viciously with each other to ensnare a male so they can drain him of his vital essences and make him feel bad about playing Masters of Orion 3 for sixty seven consecutive hours.

A bunch of girls sitting in a group, usually in a bar, all look like they are friends. But they aren't. Have you ever played CS on an open server? You know, when you're doing really well for your team and suddenly the whole pack of them turn on you and gun you down for no reason? Or you're playing Tribes 2 and if you're too good everyone votes you off the server, even your own team? That's what women are like in a bar. They are waiting for two things; either for a man to come up and impress them, or for an opportunity to shred each other to bits like that dumb NOD anti-infantry vehicle in Tiberian Sun which no one ever used. While it can be fun watching a female clique self-destruct, you'll get more gratification if you just jump on in there and try to grab one of them before her companions maul her.

By now you're probably wanting a practical example, so here's how I first got it on with The Girl. Back in the day, I lived with friends who weren't into gaming and every Friday night they'd appear at my bedroom door, wrinkle their noses a bit, and then try and convince me to come down to the pub. Now, when non-gamers use the expression 'the pub' they actually mean a whole bunch of pubs strung across town, between which they wander until they find one with a suitable clutch (or possibly brood) of females inside, who they will then try to mate with regardless of decorum, practicality or issues of personal hygiene. Anyway, one time I thought what the hell, and joined them.

By the fourth or fifth pub I'd had

about three or four Tequila shots with Frangelico and lime chasers so I was a little more relaxed than usual. My friends were working on a bunch of overdressed harpies disported across not enough squashy blue barstools, and as I turned my head a delicious nut-brown beachy sort of lass in a pair of jeans so low cut they were almost two separate bits of clothing, with sun drenched blonde hair framing a delicate, sculpted face dominated by the most massive pair of brown eyes I'd ever seen fell off her barstool in a dead faint, revealing The Girl sitting behind her, ready and waiting to be impressed. I sprang to, standing over the fallen beauty.

"Fear not!" I cried, "I know St John's!" I bent toward the comatose nymph and was immediately punched out by her bull-dyke girlfriend. I had, in a moment of heroism, forgotten I was in Sydney.

Which brings me to another excellent method of acquiring females; get injured. For while the rest of the pub was incapacitated with hysteria, an elegant and pale hand was extended in my direction. I took it, and was helped to my feet by The Girl, the woman who would come to dominate both my waking and sleeping hours and eventually, in many ways, ruin my life. We laughed. We ordered drinks. The barman called me a flatfooted pansy and refused to serve me. We went to another pub, were denied entry by Tongan bouncers and eventually ended up at an Oporto's chicken franchise eating soggy chips out of each other's hands and pausing every six minutes or so to run to the bathroom and be violently ill. It was a hell of a night, my first and only night of true romance.

Meanwhile, my friends apparently got themselves tangled in a squirming nest of feuding political science students, all female, and spent most of the early hours of Saturday morning at Newtown Police station explaining the whole thing to the pretty constables they have there.

That's what I know about falling in love. It happens, just like that. It's not like you can set up a favourites list or build a production queue for it or anything. You can't program a macro. There are no hotkeys. Pressing shift five times doesn't do anything. You just need to be in the right place, at the right time, and be prepared to take one for the team. And as for living with love, and losing love, and subsequently losing the totally awesome couch you bought together that you reckon she never paid her half for, well, that's a tale for the future.

Incidentally, if you're ever in Newtown you'll probably end up eating Thai. By default. There's like, 60 restaurants on King Street alone, it's insane.



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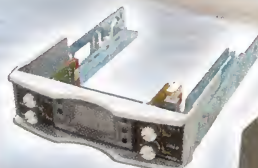
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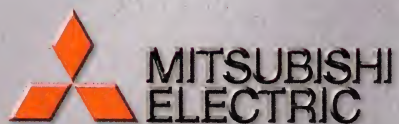
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